

Université de Montréal

The Political and Artistic Program of Prince Petru Rares of Moldavia (1527-1538 and 1541-1546) and the Fresco Series Depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” in the Church of Humor Monastery

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Thèse présentée à la Faculté des études supérieures en vue de l'obtention du grade de
Philosophiae Doctor (Ph. D.) en théologie

Mars, 2012

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Faculté des études supérieures

Cette thèse intitulée:

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Abstract

In 1993, the church of Humor Monastery and six other churches from northern Moldavia (Romania) were classified as UNESCO Patrimony, due to their unique iconographical and architectural features. Built in the sixteenth-century, Humor Monastery became a rich and vital cultural religious center under the patronage of Prince Petru Rares of Moldavia. This center encouraged ecclesial architectural innovations, as well as an extraordinarily prolific program of frescoes, both internally and externally, expressing creativity beyond the canon of painting of the time. This dissertation focuses on understanding these architectural and iconographical innovations, in the light of the historical context that gave rise to this unique moment in Moldavian history, in the century following the Fall of Constantinople (1453). While the first part of the dissertation focuses on these historical circumstances, and more precisely on the impact of the patronage of Prince Rares, the second part of the research concentrates on the literary sources and the theology of a unique fresco series depicting the “Life of the Mother of God,” which has been painted on the walls of the *gropnita* (burial chamber) of Humor monastic church.¹

The fresco series is an extraordinary example of the interaction between texts, the apocryphon *Protogospel of James* and the *Synaxarion*, and the iconographic narration of the “Life of the Mother of God.” Careful attention to the iconography of the Humor monastic church demonstrates the need for the correlation between text and icon, as well as the need for a correlation between theological studies, art and history.

¹ The fresco series is untitled. I will refer to the fresco series as the “Life of the Mother of God.”

This methodological perspective will foster a richer appreciation of the abundant cultural and religious treasures of the Christian communities of Eastern Europe, both from a cultural as well as a specifically theological perspective as a further response to their prestigious recognition of being included in the UNESCO's Patrimony in the closing decade of the twentieth - century.

Keywords: Iconography, *Protgospel of James*, *Synaxarion*, the "Life of the Mother of God"- frescoes, Mariology, Moldavia, Petru Rares, UNESCO, Humor Monastery.

Résumé

En 1993, l'église du monastère Humor et six autres églises du nord de la Moldavie (Roumanie) ont été classifiées comme patrimoine de l'UNESCO, en particulier en raison de leurs caractéristiques iconographiques et architecturales uniques. Construit au seizième siècle, le monastère Humor est devenu un riche centre religieux et culturel sous le patronage du prince Petru Rares de Moldavie. Ce centre a encouragé les innovations architecturales ecclésiales, ainsi qu'un programme très prolifique de fresques, extérieures et intérieures, exprimant une créativité au-delà du canon de la peinture de l'époque. La présente thèse est concentrée sur ces innovations architecturales et iconographiques, comprises à la lumière du contexte historique de ce moment unique dans l'histoire de la Moldavie, dans le siècle qui suivit la chute de Constantinople (1453).

Tandis que la première partie de la thèse est concentrée sur ces circonstances historiques, et plus précisément sur l'impact du patronage du Prince Rares, la deuxième partie de la recherche est concentrée sur l'analyse des sources littéraires et de la théologie d'une série unique de fresques, placée dans la *gropnita* (chambre funéraire) de l'église monastique d'Humor, évoquant la vie de la Mère de Dieu. La série est un exemple extraordinaire d'interaction des textes, le *Protévangile de Jacques* et le *Synaxarion*, avec l'iconographie.

Une attention particulière à l'iconographie du monastère Humor démontre le besoin de la corrélation entre texte et icône d'une part, ainsi que la nécessité d'une corrélation

entre les études théologiques, l'art et l'histoire d'autre part. Un autre avantage de la recherche est de contribuer à une appréciation plus riche des trésors culturels et religieux des communautés chrétiennes de l'Europe de l'Est aux points de vue religieux et culturel, en réponse à leur reconnaissance comme patrimoine de l'UNESCO.

Mots-clés : Iconographie, *Protévangile de Jacques*, *Synaxarion*, la vie de la Mère de Dieu - fresques, théologie mariale, Moldavie, Petru Rares, UNESCO, monastère Humor.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of professors, friends and family. I owe much gratitude to my supervisors, Professors Pierre Létourneau and Lucian Turcescu, for their generous help during the writing of this dissertation. I have been fortunate to have had two advisors who gave me the freedom to exercise my own initiatives and, at the same time, who provided me with the guidance to recover when my steps faltered.

My thanks to all professors from the *Faculté de théologie et de sciences des religions* of the *Université de Montréal* for their help during my PhD studies. In particular, I appreciate Professor Jean-François Roussel for his advice and guidance on the Dissertation Proposal, and Professor Alain Gignac for giving me the opportunity to be one of the students' representatives to the RRENAB Symposium, in Montpellier-France.

Special thanks are given to my dear friends David Maurice, for proofreading the drafts of the dissertation, and Marco De Petrillo for proofreading the final dissertation.

I would also like to express particular thanks to my dearest sons, Alexandru and Andrei, for their love, patience and support. Finally, words alone cannot express the thanks that I owe to my dear husband, Valentin, for his love, encouragement and assistance.

To you Theotokos

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Object and Goal of the Thesis

Iconography, the interpretation of the symbolism, themes and subject matter of icons, is a theological art - as Michel Quenot suggests - a “window on the Kingdom”.² Neither art nor theology taken separately could create an icon, for which the union of both is necessary. There are two factors that give value to a work of art in general and, implicitly, to the icon: the richness of the components of the art work combined with the rigor of their integration. Yet, as Egon Sendler observed, the icon introduces another dimension to the image, namely “transcendence, and thus projects itself beyond the forms of our world, making God’s world present.”³ The theological, aesthetic, and technical elements of icons come together in such a way that “they open themselves up to a new way of seeing things, in faith and meditation.”⁴ The use of symbols in icons allows the artist to condense complex information within the pictorial dimensions of an icon. In front of the icon, each believer can say: “Behold my faith, that in which I believe, in these divine personages and saints, made visible in forms and colors.”⁵

Iconography is an important indicator of the reception of biblical and non-biblical texts within Christian communities. Icons and frescoes depict scenes from the canonical books of the Bible, liturgical texts, and the *Synaxarion* (*The Lives of the Orthodox Saints*), and they also draw upon the apocrypha (non-biblical texts). However, the impact of apocryphal writings on iconography has been largely neglected, or, rather, it has not been

² Michel Quenot, *The Icon-Window on the Kingdom* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), p. 161.

³ Egon Sendler, *The Icon Image of the Invisible* (Torrance, Ca.: Oakwood Publication, 1999), p. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Alfredo Tradigo, *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church* (Los Angeles, Ca.: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), p. 1.

treated with the specificity required for the fuller interpretation of icons. This lack of specific attention to the influence of the apocrypha on icons is evident in the most famous studies of icons by Orthodox theologians, such as *The Meaning of Icons* by Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty* by Paul Evdokimov, and *The Theology of the Icon* by Leonid Ouspensky. These theologians indicate the iconographical sources of inspiration when they explain the theology of icons, but they do not seriously consider the influence of New Testament Apocrypha, even though these texts are very often clearly present in icons.

There is a further lacuna in the general study of icons. Scholarship on iconography focuses on Russian and Ukrainian icons (Evdokimov, Ouspensky, and Lossky) or Greek, Serbian, Cypriote, Bulgarian icons or those from Sinai Monastery (Quenot, Carlidge, Elliott, Kitzinger, Thierry, and Weitzmann). Hence the neglect of Romanian icons, although a considerable number of these are at least as old and as significant artistically as those treated by these scholars. Among the many churches in Moldavia, a Romanian county, seven have been classified in 1993 as World Heritage, especially for the iconographic and architectural innovations of their churches. Among them, the church of Humor Monastery, which is of particular interest for this dissertation, was one of the first to be covered with exterior frescoes in 1535. It may have served as a model for other externally painted churches.

The church of Humor Monastery was built during the reign of Prince Petru Rares (1527-1538 and 1541-1546), who also founded many other churches and commissioned them to be adorned with frescoes on the interior and exterior walls. In addition, Rares financed the reconstruction and painting of some monastic dwellings on Mount Athos,

Greece. While, it is true that his generosity was an expression of his devout Orthodox Christian faith, there is ample evidence to link his patronage with his political goals. After the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 many Orthodox Christians, including Prince Rares himself, fervently maintained the hope that Constantinople would be liberated from the Ottoman Muslim occupation. ‘Prophecies’ flourished about the coming of a liberator of Constantinople, and Prince Rares shared in these visions of the resurgence of Christianity in the region experiencing at first hand the expansionist designs of the Ottoman Turks. Rares saw himself playing a significant role in this drama, but he knew that to liberate Constantinople he needed military help from other Christian countries. It was, therefore, to the end of obtaining their help that he tried to establish alliances with them. However, as a believer, he also knew that military alliances were insufficient to free Constantinople. Consequently, he asked monks from Moldavia and Mount Athos to pray to the Mother of God, the protectress of Constantinople, for his victory, and he contributed materially to the monasteries. In Moldavia, he founded churches dedicated to the Mother of God - as spiritual barriers against the Ottoman conquerors - in gratitude for the independence of Moldavia and with fervent hope for her intercession with her Son for the liberation of Constantinople. Even if there were churches built and dedicated to other saints (usually to saints who were considered helpers in battle, such as St. George, Sts. Constantine and Helen – Constantine, the founder of Constantinople -, the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, among others), Rares’ devotion to the Mother of God was predominant. Thus, she was depicted in the interior church iconic programs, and she was also extensively depicted in the exterior frescoes, for example in the *Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God*.⁶

⁶ The *Akathistos Hymn* consists of praises to the Mother of God.

A striking example of this focus on the centrality of the patronage of Mary during the reign of Rares is the series of frescoes depicting the “Life of the Mother of God”, which is found at Humor Monastery, in the church’s *gropnita* (burial chamber). The two major literary sources of this series are the *Protogospel of James* and the *Synaxarion*. This example is apparently unique to Moldavia. Since there were no canons for painting the church’s exterior and the walls of the *gropnita*, the Moldavian iconographers could exercise their own judgments concerning the frescoes. Thus, alongside the traditional message of the frescoes expressing the mystery of human salvation through Christ, there is a unique representation in color of the life of the Mother of God until the return of the Holy Family from Egypt as narrated in the *Protogospel of James*, the *Synaxarion*, and the *Gospel of Luke*. This was to inspire believers through the depiction of the Virgin’s life, as well as to invoke her support for the planned liberation of Constantinople and independence of Moldavia.

The first part of the dissertation is devoted to the reign of Prince Rares and his direct influence on the church’s iconographical program by presenting the Humor Monastery in its historical, cultural, and social context. While this part describes the entire iconographical program of the church, it focuses on the *gropnita*, unique not only for its iconic program but also as a Moldavian architectural innovation that was introduced between the nave and the narthex of the church.⁷ The first part of the dissertation provides the reader with an historical and artistic background of sixteenth-century Moldavia for a better understanding of how the piety and political ambitions of a little known prince in a

⁷ The main parts of Eastern Orthodox Church architecture are the narthex (an entrance hall), the nave (the main body of the church where people stand during the services), and the altar (the area behind the iconostasis which is a screen or wall covered with icons).

small territory of Eastern Europe gave birth to a church unique to Romania and acknowledged as a world cultural treasure.

Romania, and implicitly its county Moldavia, was hidden behind the Iron Curtain until 1989. Thus, very little was known outside the country about the iconography of Romania and the historical events that shaped it. The dissertation in general, and the first part in particular, attempts to be a pathfinder for a better understanding of Moldavian iconography and the influence which secular history had upon it. The dissertation constitutes original research in the sense that, for the first time, historical, iconographic and theological issues are brought together in an effort to cover all aspects of the reign of Prince Rares in Moldavia and the impact he had on the iconic program of the church of Humor Monastery.

The second part of the dissertation focuses on the iconic program of frescoes depicting the “Life of the Mother of God.” The series of commissioned frescoes originated not just as a result of Prince Rares’ devotion, but specifically as an offering to the Mother of God from whom he hoped to receive help in meeting his political goals. While a prince’s political ambitions do not have a place in iconography, Rares found subtle ways to translate his political ambitions into the art which he commissioned and to use it as a vehicle for political propaganda.

One might presume that the *Menaion* was a literary source for the depiction of the fresco series of the “Life of the Mother of God” since the iconography is “liturgical art” and the *Menaion* is the book containing the liturgical texts of the Orthodox Church. I have consulted “The Menaion of the Orthodox Church,” a translation in English of the Slavonic *Menaion* (containing also some services from the Greek *Menaion*), as well as the modern

Romanian edition of the *Menaion* and an eighteenth century Romanian edition in order to explore the source as a possible literary source for the fresco series of the “Life of the Mother of God.” There are no clear examples of such an influence.⁸ Since the frescoes depicting the lives of saints in the narthex of the majority (if not all) the sixteenth century Moldavian churches have as their literary source the *Synaxarion*, one might presume that the fresco series of the “Life of the Mother of God” has also the *Synaxarion* as its literary source. Yet, a careful examination of this fresco series supports the argument that the *Protogospel of James* is its literary source.

In the second part of the dissertation I provide a comparative study of the fresco series depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” with the *Synaxarion* and the *Protogospel of James* concluding that the narrative of the frescoes is related to both textual narratives. The frescoes of major Marian Orthodox feasts from the “Life of the Mother of God,” such as the *Nativity of the Mother of God*, the *Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple* and the *Nativity of Christ*, are depicted in a traditional manner, with the notable exception of the *Annunciation* which is depicted precisely as described in the *Protogospel of James*. Since the *Synaxarion* is depicted in the narthex of the sixteenth-century Moldavian churches, the question arises how the *gropnita*’s iconographer could depict, alongside the *Synaxarion*, the *Protogospel of James*, since copies of this apocryphon, dated before the

⁸ *The Menaion of the Orthodox Church*, Br. Isaac E. Lambertsen transl. 15 vols. (Liberty, TN: St. John of Kronstadt Press, 1996), *Minee*, 12 vols. (Bucuresti, Romania: Editura Institutului Biblic si de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Romana, 1984); and *Mineiul de Ramnic*, 2 vols. (Romania, 1789). The *Mineiul de Ramnic* is the oldest Romanian *Menaion* I could consult and probably the closest version to the *Menaion* that was in circulation in sixteenth century Moldavia. The care for the genuine preservation of the liturgical texts for the Marian feasts in all *Menaion* is remarkable. The following are the liturgical texts that have been consulted: September 5 to 12, October 1, November 20 to 25, December 9, December 20 to 31, February 1 to 9, March 24 to 26, July 2 and 25, July 25, August 14 to 23 and 31.

sixteenth-century, are rare and seeing that its content was never depicted on the walls of other Moldavian churches? The answer might be found in the Romanian Academy Library, where there is a thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Protogospel of James* written in Greek, which seems to be unique to Romania. While we cannot confirm conclusively that this manuscript is the literary source of the frescoes, what we can confirm is that the *gropnita* of the church of Humor Monastery is the only place in Moldavia where the “Life of the Mother of God,” having as literary source the *Protogospel of James* alongside the *Synaxarion*, was illustrated in frescoes. Indeed, a depiction of the life of the Virgin taking so many of its themes and details from the time of her conception to the return from Egypt of the Holy Family is rare, if not unique, in Christian iconography. This is exactly the time frame of the *Protogospel of James*.

That the iconographer ‘dared’ to use as source an apocryphon is not so unusual since sixteenth-century Moldavian iconographers in general drew inspiration for their works not only from the canonical biblical books but also from less famous sources. For example, on the exterior wall at the church of Humor monastery, the fresco of the *Last Judgment* is depicted according to the vision of a fourth-century bishop Nifon of Constantiana and not as described in the New Testament (e.g. Mt 25:40-45). Moreover, inside the altar of Humor monastic church, Christ is depicted as a lamb, a symbolic depiction of the Eucharistic sacrifice, although this was replaced in iconography with the person of Christ since 680, at the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, when the representation of Christ as a lamb was forbidden.

After a careful analysis of the literary sources of the fresco narrative, the second part of the dissertation also presents the theology of the fresco series forming the “Life of

the Mother of God”depicted on the walls of church’s *gropnita*. Prince Rares had a special devotion to the Mother of God, owing to the influence on him of at least two Moldavian monks who themselves held the Mother of God in deep veneration: his cousin, Grigorie Rosca, abbot of Probota Monastery and later Moldavian Metropolitan, and abbot Paisie of Humor Monastery, Rares’ counselor and spiritual father. The dedication of Humor community to the Mother of God can be seen in all Humor frescoes in general and in the *gropnita*’ frescoes in particular. Yet, besides Marian theology, the series of frescoes depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” has another message to transmit, namely the hope of Prince Rares to be the Emperor of Byzantium through the intercession of the Virgin’s prayers.

This research project is a place of intersection between Church History, Art History and Theology, and is original on two levels. First, I present the Humor Monastery, a UNESCO monument, in its historical context, emphasizing the influence Prince Petru Rares had on Moldavian art in general and on the iconography of the Humor monastic church in particular. It is the first time that Prince Rares is presented as princely patron of Moldavian art and as an Orthodox Christian prince who hoped, with the help of the Mother of God, to be the liberator of Constantinople from Ottoman occupation. The Mother of God, to whom Prince Rares had special devotion, is depicted on the church’s walls as she is described in the canonical Gospels and liturgical hymns, prophesied in the Old Testament, honoured in the *Akathistos Hymn*, celebrated in *Synaxarion*, and, finally, as her life is narrated in the *Protogospel of James*. In the appendix, I have included a photocopy of a thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Protogospel of James* that I found at the Library of the

Romanian Academy which, alongside the *Synaxarion*, is a possible literary source of the series of frescoes depicting the “Life of the Mother of God”.⁹

This research project is also original because, for the first time, the frescoes from the *gropnita* of the Humor monastic church, representing the “Life of the Mother of God”, are photographed, analyzed for their compositional elements and their theological perspective, and presented to the scholarly community. While Lafontaine-Dosogne, in 1965, made extensive research into the iconography of Mary’s childhood, both in Eastern and Western churches, she did not include the church of Humor Monastery. It is possible that, when she was writing her book, access to Romania was limited for western researchers because of Communist strictures.

The following paragraph clarifies what this dissertation is not. It is not an attempt to establish whether or not the thirteenth-century copy of the *Protogospel of James*, found in the Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest, is the principal literary source for the *gropnita* fresco series depicting the “Life of the Mother of God”. Neither is it an analysis of the *Protogospel of James* or the *Synaxarion*. Rather it is a comparison of frescoes and narrative sequences describing the same events in the aforementioned two sources in order to establish what could best serve as the textual foundation for the fresco series. Finally, it is not a study of the vast range of the liturgical hymnography for commemorations of the Mother of God or of patristic and later homilies bearing on the Virgin's life.

Whatever the reason for the lack of detailed analysis of the Humor frescoes, the recent designation of the monastery as part of World Patrimony points to the fact that there

⁹ The specialists in the *Protogospel* refer to about 150 manuscripts from around the world, dating from the fourth to the sixteenth century, and translated into several languages. However, they do not mention the manuscript from the Library of the Romanian Academy. See Wilhelm Schneemelcher and R. McL. Wilson, eds., *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. I. (Cambridge, UK: J. Clarke, 1991), p. 421; Boyd L. Daniels, *The Greek Manuscript Tradition of the Protoevangelium Jacobi* (s.l.: s.n., microfilm, 1956), p. 32.

is a growing recognition of the cultural significance of the Humor monastic church, a recognition that also underlies my own awareness of its importance. Thus, the goal of my research was not only to highlight the beauty and theological richness of the frescoes that adorn the Humor monastic church, but also to analyze the particular nexus of cultural, political and religious impulses that lay behind the uniqueness of the architecture and frescoes of this sixteenth-century monastic establishment, and thus to contribute to a more competent understanding of Romanian Orthodoxy.

However, the analysis of the frescoes of the monastic church reveals more than the presence of a subtle political program. The iconographer has grasped the opportunity provided by architectural innovations to communicate an extraordinarily rich theological perspective of Marian theology on the walls of the *gropnita* of the Humor monastic church. Drawing on ancient traditions of the life of the Mother of God, both canonical and apocryphal, the iconographer illustrates a central theological theme - the great 'reversals' of human expectations in the narrative of divine salvation - a virgin gives birth, God assumes the human condition. The iconographer knits the stories of the apocryphal text of the second century into the powerful narrative of God's saving action throughout the Scriptures. Under his skilful brush, the apocryphal narrative of the early life of the *Theotokos* (Mother of God) are infused with profound insights, not only for the community of sixteenth-century Moldavia, but also for contemporary research, both among art historians and theologians. The careful analysis of the theological program of the Moldavian iconographer underlines my basic argument for respecting the interdisciplinary nature of the study of iconography.

Methodology

This study calls for the application of several methodologies. The first part of the dissertation utilizes a *church historical method*, precisely the integral or organic model of church history outlined by James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller, *Church History: An Introduction to Research, Reference Works, and Methods*. Bradley and Muller present new methodological approaches in both history and systematic or philosophical disciplines within theological studies. The authors approach the subject of church history from two different standpoints: the history of doctrine, and the history of the institution of the church integrating the idea of the church within its respective social and cultural contexts. The authors encourage students to consider those research topics that have the greatest potential for drawing intellectual and social history together in order to break down the older distinctions between the study of ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ history.¹⁰ This demands a more “holistic approach that takes full cognizance of the subtle social, political, and philosophical influences on theology.”¹¹ Thus, this ‘*integral*’ or ‘*organic model*,’ attempts a synchronous understanding of the development of the central idea of Christianity, encouraging a broader dialog between different theological topics, such as social concerns, politics, arts, etc., underlying the interaction and confrontation of these topics in the Church. This model guides the study of Prince Petru Rares’ reign and explains the influence he had on the churches’ iconographic program. Thus, the *organic model*

¹⁰ James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller, *Church History: An Introduction to Research, Reference Works, and Methods* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), p. 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

provides the opportunity to present the Humor Monastery in its sixteenth-century theological, cultural, political, social, and artistic Moldavian context.¹²

The careful marshalling of the relevant historical resources conveys a rounded presentation of sixteenth-century Moldavia and highlights the influence that Prince Petru Rares had on church iconography. Moldavia's millennia-long position at the convergence of religious, political and cultural influences between East and West necessitates taking into consideration a wide range of historical viewpoints. I used historical references about Romania by Western scholars (e.g. Keith Hitchins, Dennis Deletant), Romanian historians who wrote before the Communist period (e.g. Nicolae Iorga), and Romanian historians who wrote after the collapse of Communism (e.g. Mihai Barbulescu, Serban Papacostea, Pompiliu Teodor). This careful selection of a range of historical analyses ensures that my secondary sources are not influenced by one-sided ideological considerations in their presentations. Given that the epoch of Petru Rares (16th century) was not of particular interest to Communist historians for their ideological purposes, I also decided to use scholarly histories written under Communism, especially by art historians who had a reputation for objectivity (e.g. Vasile Dragut), as well as sixteenth-century historical writings that were published in critical editions under Communism.

After elaborating on the history of sixteenth-century Moldavia in general and the Humor Monastery in particular, I present the influence Prince Rares had on the development of Moldavian art. I emphasize Rares' devotion to the Mother of God, from whom he hoped to receive help to liberate Constantinople and to establish the

¹² Part of the integral method is the social and economic history which I did not cover very well because of the lack of information on this topic of sixteenth century Moldavia.

independence of Moldavia. His devotion to the Mother of God, together with the depth of devotion to Mary within the monastic communities, gave birth to an extensive Marian iconography. The particular features of Marian devotion that were developed in Moldavia during the reign of Prince Rares provide the necessary background for a detailed study of one of the most intriguing iconic programs in ecclesial architecture in Moldavia. This is the “Life of the Mother of God,” depicted on the walls of the *gropnita* of the church in the Humor Monastery complex. I chose to analyze the series of frescoes depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” for two reasons: first, it is the most extensive and complex iconic program depicting the Virgin’s life in Moldavia, and second, this fresco series was never studied academically, although it is unique in Romanian iconography.

The traditional way of analyzing an iconic program is to connect it with its sources: the Gospels, the *Synaxarion*, liturgical texts, etc. The challenge for me was to show that for the “Life of the Mother of God,” the Moldavian iconographer did not hesitate to source this iconic program on both canonical and apocryphal writings. Thus, I composed a chart setting the pictorial representations and literary sources from the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion* side by side and compared them. This analysis suggested that the “Life of the Mother of God” does not have the *Synaxarion* as its ultimate literary source, as a theologian might naturally expect, or the *Protogospel of James*, as an art historian might suppose. The iconographer creatively depicted the “Life of the Mother of God” from a multisource perspective, drawing on both the *Synaxarion* and the *Protogospel*, as well as other canonical and apocryphal writings, while also taking in consideration the tradition of iconography for the icons of the Great Feasts.

Establishing the literary sources for the series of frescoes depicting the “Life of the

Mother of God” was the first of three steps, describing how the iconographer changed the written narration into a painted narration. The method of shifting from the written to the painted medium is explained in detail by Valerii Lepakhin.¹³ He identifies four main steps in the process of changing a text into vivid icons:

1. *transposition*: the transfer of the narrative sections of the text to the image answering the question of ‘what’ to transfer;
2. *transfiguration* of the text into image: answering the question ‘how’ ” one can translate from one artistic language into another, namely from literary to visual;
3. *insertion* of written words on the painted image; and
4. *projection*: the transfer of the conceptual model from text to image.

Through the *transposition*, the iconographer creates a new narrative unit by selecting some elements from different texts, and depicting them in fresco format. By using this filtration, he arrives at a new narrative unit. However, as Lepakhin writes, “the fresco cannot rest only at the level of the transposition” since it has to communicate the Christian significance of what it depicts.¹⁴ “An icon/fresco must express the inner Christian meaning of the event, its meaning for Christianity, and it must both explain and convey this to the believer.”¹⁵ Consequently, the iconographic technique aims at the *transfiguration* of the text into image. Representation of space and time belongs to the sphere of *transfiguration*. There are scholars who trace a distinct limit between the painted image and the narration, considering them as obviously contradictory.¹⁶ For them, an image is a static space in

¹³ For the relation between the text and the iconic representation, and the method of changing the literary narration into iconic narration, I use the article of Valerii Lepakhin, “Basic Types of Correlation between Text and Icon, between Verbal and Visual Icons,” *Literature and Theology*, 20 (2006), pp. 20-30.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Clive Bell are two such scholars. For details concerning the debate between these and other scholars who explain literature and painting as parallel forms of expression, see Biberman

contrast with a narration, which functions in time. They hold that there is no way of reconciliation between the painted image and narration because they are in a space-time type of opposition. They even concluded that narration is the exclusive hallmark of literature.¹⁷ In my dissertation, I indicate the link between narration and frescoes in a different way. Although the frescoes have written narratives as sources of inspiration, they are not extensions or supplements of the literary sources. They are distinct narrations, which function within their own space and time and have their own language.¹⁸

The third relation between the written and iconographic narrations is the *insertion* of the written text into the painted image. The first form of imposition is giving a title to the fresco. After the fresco is finished, at the top of it is written the title of the represented feast. Without a name, the icon is not authentic, and, because the name symbolizes the sacred seal of authenticity, prayers are not recited in front of it.¹⁹

In my dissertation, I use only these three steps from Lepakhin's methodology. The fourth relation between text and image, *projection*, is the transfer of the conceptual model from the text to the image, using abstractionism or conceptualism. The *projection* helps in recognizing the differences between icon painting and secular, religious paintings. I do not use this fourth principle because my dissertation does not deal with differences between icons and other religious paintings.

The *transfiguration* of the text and the *insertion* of the written text on the frescoes are extensively used in chapter 6 of my dissertation where I explain the theology of the

Efrat, "On Narrativity in the Visual Field: A Psychoanalytic View of Velazquez's Las Meninas," *Narrative* 14 (2006), pp. 237-239.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Literary narrations are produced and deciphered by the application of certain codes. Thus, if one looks at the frescoes as "iconic narratives", one has to observe the rules and the symbols, which compose the iconic language. A preliminary condition to 'reading' and understanding frescoes is to be acquainted with these conventions.

¹⁹ Lepakhin, p. 24.

frescoes forming the “Life of the Mother of God.” For this chapter I have consulted the works of theologians specialized in iconography. I have also introduced, at the same time, my own contributions for a deeper understanding of the frescoes’ theological message.

Finally, the dissertation contains over sixty photos of Moldavian churches with their unique frescoes that I took in 2008 during my research trip in Romania, as well as computer generated architectural reconstructions.

PART I: THE REIGN OF PRINCE RARES AND THE HUMOR MONASTERY

Introduction to Part I

The historical method, specifically the “integral (or organic) model,” will be used in the first part of the dissertation (chapters one to four), to analyze the historical background of sixteenth-century Moldavia in order to integrate the birth of the Humor Monastic establishment within its respective political, social and cultural contexts. The presentation and analysis of the sixteenth-century historical circumstances provide the opportunity to explain the context in which Moldavian religious art under the patronage of Prince Petru Rares (1527-1538; 1541-1546) acquired its climax in architectural and iconographical innovations as never occurred before or after his reign.

The first chapter will study the years 1457 to 1546, beginning with the reign of Prince Stephen the Great and ending with the death of his son Petru Rares. To study a period of time one needs to take into consideration at least two sources: written accounts of past events recorded at the time they took place, and modern accounts by scholars specializing in that region and period. In the case of Moldova, there is a reasonably large amount of material that survives from that time. Moreover, western and Romanian historians wrote rather abundantly about Moldavia. These resources will provide the material for the analysis of Prince Rares’ reign.

Whatever the ambiguity of the political career of Prince Rares, it is important to acknowledge the impact of his personal motivations and decisions in facing the new and expansionist Ottoman Empire that influenced the Moldavian Orthodox Church’s iconographic program. Thus, the dissertation is not only a historical study of Rares’ reign as such, but integrates the research on the Moldavian church with a precise focus on

ecclesial innovations under the patronage of Prince Rares. This particular aspect will be studied in the second chapter of the dissertation. Moldavian iconography reached its climax under the reign of Prince Rares and the iconographers covered not only the churches' interior walls but also the exterior walls with elaborate frescoes. These latter, masterpieces of mural painting, are unique in post-Byzantine art.

The frescoes studied would not have existed had Prince Rares not provided the iconographers with the opportunity to create an innovative iconic program for the exterior walls of the churches. One of them, the *Fall of Constantinople*, as part of the *Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God*, is of particular interest since it reflects the political ambition of Prince Rares. This fresco will be studied in chapter 3 and, using the historic-organic model, I will examine the prince's political influence on iconography. The chapter is directed towards a synchronous understanding of this important motif of Christianity in sixteenth-century Moldavia, and allows the examination of the fresco as a meeting place between art, politics, and social concerns.

The fresco of the *Fall of Constantinople*, paradoxically claiming a Moldavian victory, was first depicted on the exterior fresco of the monastic church at Humor, and later depicted as such on other churches. The fresco speaks about Rares's piety towards the Mother of God, to whom he prayed to receive help for the liberation of Constantinople. The Humor Monastery, dedicated to the Mother of God, will be studied in chapter 4. This chapter will emphasize the cultural side of the monastic establishment, which is one of the organic model's branches used in this part of the dissertation. More precisely, the Humor Monastery will be presented not only as a major sixteenth-century Moldavian center, but also as an example of architectural and iconographical innovation.

The entire Part I of the dissertation is, on the one hand, an attempt to present the Humor Monastery in its sixteenth-century theological, cultural, political, social, and artistic Moldavian context. On the other hand, the goal is to emphasize the creative and innovative depiction of the Mother of God within the monastic church. Prince Rares' piety towards, and hope for help from, the Mother of God gave the impetus to the birth of a remarkable iconic program, the "Life of the Mother of God." This program, unique for Moldavian iconography, as well as for that of the whole of Romanian iconography, will be studied in Part II of the dissertation.

1. THE TURBULENT REIGN OF PRINCE RARES OF MOLDAVIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EXPANSION OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

1.1. Introduction

The years 1457 to 1546, beginning with the reign of Prince Stephen the Great and ending with the death of his son Petru Rares, marked the finest period of military achievements and cultural prosperity in Moldavian history. Just decades after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks (1453), Byzantine culture and art were coming to life again in Moldavia in an original way. Manuscripts were illuminated with remarkable care, sculpture in wood and ivory flourished, and the technique of engineering works and fortification was developed. Above all, new and original architecture and church painting techniques were introduced. This unique artistic period took place within a tumultuous political climate across the whole of Europe. The Moldavian princes fought or made compromises to keep their thrones. They fought against the invasion of the Ottomans or sold their independence to the Sultan to enjoy material advantages. In the following section, I will present a short history of this period in Moldavia, and then focus on the architectural and iconographical innovations that characterized Moldavian churches during the reign of Prince Rares.

1.2. Prince Stephen the Great, the Father of Petru Rares

Stephen the Great, Petru Rares' father, became prince of Moldavia in 1457, his reign lasting forty-seven years until his death in 1504. During his reign, forty-four monasteries and churches were built, enriching the principality of Moldavia with Orthodox

sanctuaries.²⁰ According to legend, Stephen erected a church after each battle on the advice of his spiritual confessor, Daniil Sihastrul (Daniel the Hermit).²¹ The chronicler Grigorie Ureche (1590-1647) mentions that Stephen considered a year without war as a misfortune and this might well account for the proliferation of churches under his reign.²² Ureche examines the reign of Stephen the Great in his work *The Chronicle of the Rulers of Moldavia and Their Life*, which covers the period from the establishment of Moldavia in 1359 to the year 1594. Rulers at the time usually hired one of the monks or scribes to record their reign. Unfortunately, for fear of saying the wrong things and being punished, their writings were often flattering their patrons and are not always historically trustworthy. It is significant that Ureche himself claimed that he wrote his *Chronicle* with no intention to please or flatter any of the rulers. In his own words, it was written so that “the past years should not be drowned in oblivion.”²³ He insisted that, for his *Chronicle*, he examined both Moldavian and foreign documents and gather the historical data because he wanted to be a “reliable historian and not a writer of vain words.”²⁴ A deeply religious spirit characterizes his writing, which at the same time is natural, simple and fluent.

According to Ureche, Moldavia never had a prince like Prince Stephen the Great.²⁵ While Ureche presents the prince as quick-tempered and ready to shed innocent blood, as well as to kill without impunity even during a feast, he also stresses the prince’s intelligence, his courage in battles, and his agility as a war strategist. Moldavians loved the

²⁰ Grigorie Ureche, *Chronique de Moldavie, depuis le milieu du XIV^e siècle jusqu’à l’an 1594*, edited by Émile Picot, texte roumain avec traduction française, notes historiques, tableaux genealogiques glossaire et table (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1878), p. 221.

²¹ Vasile Dragut, *Pictura murala din Moldova sec. xv-xvi (The Moldavian Mural Painting XV-XVI Centuries)* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Meridiane, 1982), p. 11.

²² Ureche, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

prince, although he kept them at war for the entire length of his reign. It is sufficient to read the following passage about Stephen's death to see the love and honour accorded to him by the Moldavian people:

He was buried at the Monastery of Putna amid the sorrow and tears of all the inhabitants, who deplored him as a father. They knew that they were losing a great benefactor and leader.²⁶

Stephen lived a life of earthly failings and had illegitimate children, but he was at the same time a committed Christian.²⁷ Prince Stephen became famous both in the region and beyond especially after he defeated the armies of Sultan Mehmed II in the battle of Vaslui (1475), thus stopping the advance of the Ottomans toward Europe.²⁸ News of this victory traveled fast throughout Europe, a phenomenon that bears witness to the unexpected power and influence of Moldavia.²⁹

Although it was marked by continuing strife, the reign of Prince Stephen managed to maintain a country that was relatively free from political and religious interference, while it continued to flourish artistically. He had managed to keep at bay his Hungarian and Polish neighbors, who were planning to carve up Moldavia, and the Ottoman Turks, for most of his reign. However, towards the end of his rule, Stephen had to conclude a treaty with Sultan Bayezid II, which involved the payment of an annual tribute to the Ottoman Porte in exchange for freedom from political and religious interference from the latter.³⁰ This was the price that Stephen paid for the preservation of Moldavia's administration and

²⁶ Marcu Beza, "The Romanian Chroniclers," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 9, (1930), p. 124.

²⁷ Petru Rares was one of the illegitimate sons of Stephen the Great. Romanians sometimes compare Stephen the Great with the Psalmist David who also had earthy failings, although his life was devoted to God. .

²⁸ Mihai Barbulescu, Dennis Deletant Serban Papacostea, Pompiliu Teodor and Keith Hitchins, *Istoria Romaniei (Romanian History)* (Bucharest, Romania: Corint, 2004), p. 158.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.158; and Nicolae Iorga, *Studii asupra evului mediu romanesc (Studies on the Romanian Middle Ages)*, edited by Serban Papacostea (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Stiintifica si Enciclopedica, 1984), p. 246.

³⁰ Stefan S. Gorovei, *Petru Rares* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Militara, 1982), p. 24.

its secular civil and ecclesiastical institutions. Muslim law did not apply in Moldavia and the building of mosques was not allowed on its territory.³¹ However, before he died, Stephen suggested that the bishops and council of boyars (members of the highest rank of the Moldavian aristocracy) recognize the sovereignty of the Ottomans because they were too powerful in comparison with the Moldavian forces.³²

The important battles won by Stephen against the Ottoman Turks earned him the reputation of being the defender of Romanian Orthodoxy. The chronicler Ureche recorded how people regarded Stephen as a saint after his death:

After his death, they called him Stephen the Saint, not on account of his soul, which is in the hands of God - for he was a man with sins - but on account of the great deeds he accomplished.³³

Stephen the Great is considered one of the greatest Romanian princes. He was canonized as a saint on 20 June 1992 by the Romanian Orthodox Church under the name the Right-believer Voivod Stephen the Great and Holy.³⁴ His feast is celebrated in the Romanian Orthodox Church on 2 July, the day of his death in 1504.

Under the reign of Stephen's two sons Bogdan, prince of Moldavia (1504-1517) and Stefanita, prince of Moldavia (1517-1527), there came a period of political instability and there was stagnation in religious art and architecture. Only one church was erected during Bogdan's reign. The bishops were coerced to hold the same political convictions as the princes, and non-conformists were replaced or else forced to renounce by "free choice"

³¹ Barbulescu, et.al., *op.cit.*, p. 169.

³² Ureche, *op.cit.*, p. 221.

³³ Beza, "The Roumanian Chroniclers", p. 124.

³⁴ The act of canonization is available electronically at <http://www.stefancelmare.ro/Tomos-s2-ss13.htm> (accessed on 25 September 2009) ("Voyvod" is a Slavic title, the equivalent of the English "prince").

their episcopal seats.³⁵ This instability had its consequences on the church's life, as did the Ottoman system of *millet*, by which Christian subjects were administrated as a "separate community" ruled by its own religious leaders. This system was widely used in the Balkans and in Moldavia.³⁶ After twenty-three years of religious and political instability, Moldavia was to experience a revival of religious and political life during the reign of Prince Petru Rares.

1.3. The Reign of Prince Rares (1527-1538; 1541-1546)

1.3.1. The First Reign (1527-1538)

Petru Rares was one of the illegitimate sons of Stephen the Great. His mother was Maria Răreșoia of Hârlău, whose personal history is not documented, although legend has it that she was the wife of a wealthy boyar and fish seller nicknamed Rarăș ("thin-haired").³⁷ This nickname of his mother's husband became Petru's name too.³⁸ According to Moldavian constitutional law of that time, the ruler of the country could be selected from amongst the prince's sons, whether legitimate or illegitimate, but their princely origin had

³⁵ Mircea Pacurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Romane (The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church)*, vol. 1 (Bucharest, Romania: Institutul Biblic si de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Romane), 1991, p. 469.

³⁶ According to the *millet* system, after the Turkish occupation of the Balkans in the fourteenth century, civil authority was directly assumed by the Orthodox Church hierarchy in the Middle East. It was granted by the new Muslim overlords, who chose to administer their Christian subjects as a separate community, or *millet*, ruled by its own religious leaders. This was possible due to the *Quranic* concept of *millet*, a religious community of the Abrahamic religions, usually applied in medieval times to non-Muslims such as Christians and Jews. The patriarch of Constantinople was appointed and the sultan approved him as head (*millet-bachi*) of the entire Orthodox Christian population of the Ottoman Empire. Understood by some, especially the Greeks, as the heir of Byzantine emperors and by others, especially the Balkan Slavs and Romanians, as an agent of the hated Turks, the patriarch exercised these powers until the secularization of the Turkish republic by Kemal Atatürk in 1923, founder and first president of the republic. See: John Meyendorff, "Eastern Orthodoxy," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2009. Encyclopædia Britannica, online, <http://0-search.eb.com/mercury.concordia.ca/eb/article-11161> (accessed on 7 Oct. 2009).

³⁷ Gorovei, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

³⁸ Ion Toderascu, "Prima Domnie" in *Petru Rares*, edited by Leon Simanschi (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1978), p. 52.

to be proven.³⁹ According to historical sources, the princely origin of Petru Rares was confirmed by his mother, who presented herself in front of the boyars showing them a document signed by Stephen the Great in which he confirmed Petru to be his son.⁴⁰ With this document, and with the confirmation of the archbishop “with his own mouth” that Petru was Stephen the Great’s son, Moldavian boyars chose Peter Măjariul, nicknamed Rares, as the ruler of their country.⁴¹ Rares was prince of Moldavia twice, first during 1527-1538, and then during 1541-1546.

The chronicler Grigorie Ureche wrote that when Rares became the ruler of Moldavia, he brought peace and cared for his people like “a good shepherd.”⁴² The later chronicler, Ion Neculce (1672-1745), completed Ureche’s account with some additional observations. For instance, he claimed that the boyars elected Peter Rares in his absence, while he was fishing in Galati.⁴³ Other sources claim that he spent his youth at the sultan’s palace, where he was sent as a guarantee by his father, Stephen the Great.⁴⁴ According to a third opinion, when he was elected prince by the boyars he was wandering through Poland, where he had been exiled because his stepbrothers were afraid of him as a candidate for the throne of Moldavia.⁴⁵ However, there are many documents that attest to the fact that Rares spent his youth in Moldavia and was in very close contact with his stepbrother, Prince

³⁹ Paul Henry, *Les églises de la Moldavie du nord des origines à la fin du XVIe siècle : architecture et peinture : contribution à l'étude de la civilisation moldave* (Paris, France: E. Leroux, 1930), p. 136.

⁴⁰ Gorovei, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

⁴¹ Grigore Ureche, *Letopisetul Tarii Moldove*, edited by Liviu Onu (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Stiintifica, 1967), p. 99.

⁴² Ureche, *op.cit.*, p. 99.

⁴³ Ion Neculce, *O Sama De Cuvinte*, edited by Iorgu Iordan (Bucharest, Romania: Editura de Stat pentru Arta), 1959, p. 12-13; and Toderascu, “Prima Domnie,” p. 51. Rares was a fisherman and he was fishing when people came to him to make him their ruler.

⁴⁴ Ioan Ursu, *Petru Rares* (Bucharest, Romania, 1923), p. 6.

⁴⁵ Iorga, *op.cit.*, p. 320.

Stefanita, who was on the Moldavian throne.⁴⁶ However, Stefanita, a despotic prince, was killed by boyars who implicated his wife Ruxandra in their murderous plan.

Following the death of Stefanita, the bishop and the boyars sent for Rares to bring him from Galati to Suceava (capital of Moldavia) to crown him. According to the narrative, one night during his journey to Suceava, he had a wonderful dream: two hills of gold bowed before him.⁴⁷ Rares interpreted this dream as a ‘prophecy’ that he would be a strong prince. At that time, there were many ‘prophecies’ about a liberator of Constantinople, which had been occupied in 1453 by the Ottoman Turks. These described the liberator as a light-haired old man, merciful, pious, and modest.⁴⁸ The Russians interpreted the ‘prophecies’ as referring to themselves, but this was not the case in Moldavia. Rares believed that they referred to him. He, an illegitimate child and possessed of a modest disposition, unexpectedly became prince at the age of 40, somewhat ‘elderly’ at that time. Such details seemed to fit the ‘prophecies’ well, hence Rares’ desire to identify himself with the foretold liberator of Constantinople.⁴⁹ His sense of personal mission was visualized even in church frescoes (as we will see below). When he arrived at Suceava, people were waiting for him and welcomed him, and when he saw them, he said: “For a long time I have been waiting for such a thing.”⁵⁰ However, the political circumstances were not favorable for fulfilling Rares’ hope of stopping the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in Europe. In fact, his rise to power coincided with the inauguration of the leadership of the Ottoman Turks by Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566), who was the

⁴⁶ Toderascu, “Prima Domnie,” pp. 45-56.

⁴⁷ Neculce, *op.cit.*, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁸ Constantin Ciobanu, *Sursele Literare ale Programelor Iconografice din Pictura Murala Medievala Moldava* (Chisinau, Institutul Studiul Artelor, 2005), pp. 74-78.

⁴⁹ Toderascu, “Prima Domnie,” p. 54.

⁵⁰ Beza, “The Roumanian Chroniclers,” p. 126.

driving force for the campaign of expansion of the Ottoman Empire into the very heart of Europe. The conquest of Belgrade (1521) and then the battle of Mohács (1526) were strategic victories for the Ottomans in their ambition to expand towards central Europe.⁵¹ Suleiman was aware of the political and religious contradictions eroding the European Christian world, which gave him an even greater opportunity for success. In fact, there were two Empires that had the same goal: the Habsburg Empire, with its hegemonic tendency (in the Ottoman view, this represented the driving Christian force in Europe), and the Ottoman Empire, that wanted to conquer as much of Europe as possible in order to consolidate the occupation of the territories already under its control.⁵²

The Romanian Principalities were geographically situated in proximity with the Ottoman offensive line.⁵³ For Suleiman, control of the region was a stringent necessity for better control of this part of Europe. He wanted to discourage any attempt by these principalities to become involved in Christian alliances. He also knew that the Romanian Principalities not only had natural resources (gold, silver, salt, etc.), but “all the richness people need: food, vineyards, cows, and all kinds of fish; mountains covered with virgin forests, lakes and rivers.”⁵⁴ These territorial riches could augment the material resources Suleiman needed for his political goal of conquering Europe.

It was during this difficult period that Petru Rares became the ruler of Moldavia. Rares was well aware of the Ottoman threat, but he was nonetheless determined to defend Moldavia’s liberty and naively hoped to eventually liberate Constantinople. Therefore, the prince started political discussions for alliances with the Habsburgs and Russia, while

⁵¹ Tahsin Gemil, “In Fata Impactului Otoman (Confronting the Ottoman Impact)” in *Petru Rares*, edited by Leon Simanschi (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1978), p. 137.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁵³ In the sixteenth century, there were three Romanian Principalities: Walachia, Moldavia and Transylvania.

⁵⁴ Gorovei, *op.cit.*, pp. 22-23.

trying to engage and motivate Poland to oppose the Ottoman Empire. Being already under threat from an alliance between the Habsburgs, Moscow and the Teutonic Order, Poland refused to join the anti-Ottoman alliance.⁵⁵

However that may be, Rares succeeded in signing an anti-Ottoman alliance treaty with the Habsburg King Ferdinand I in 1535. He considered it an opportune time to start attacking the Turks, since, at that time, the sultan was away on a campaign to conquer Persia.⁵⁶ The alliance did not have any positive results. Ironically, it was one of the reasons why Rares lost his throne in 1538. When the Habsburgs were threatened by the Ottomans, they preferred to arrive at an agreement with the Porte, the central government of the Ottoman Empire, instead of opting for a military conflict. Moreover, Rares' coalition with the Habsburg Empire could not put forth a strong anti-Ottoman resistance without Poland's involvement, which was vital to stop the Ottoman advance and maintain a defense of Moldavia. Suleiman the Magnificent was informed about Rares' plans and the Habsburg alliance, and he tried to win Rares over to his side in his campaign against the Habsburgs.⁵⁷ The Moldavian prince not only refused, but, confident of the efficacy of Habsburg support, he was determined to wage war on the Ottoman Empire. In the same year, 1538, the Ottomans, supported by the Tatars and Poland, went against Moldavia in a campaign named *Gazây-I Kara Boğdan* (the holy war for Moldavia).⁵⁸ Ottoman sources mention that

⁵⁵ Gemil, "In fâta impactului otoman," p. 140.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 146-149.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 150.

⁵⁸ Leon Simanschi, "Agresiunea Otomano-Tataro-Poloneza si Caderea lui Petru Rares (The Ottoman, Tatar and Polish's Agresion and the Fall of Rares)" in *Petru Rares*, edited by Leon Simanschi (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Ramania, 1978), p. 151.

the sultan's campaign had as its principal cause the formation of an anti-Ottoman coalition with the participation of Moldavia under the leadership of Petru Rares.⁵⁹

The final battle did not take place because the Moldavian boyars retreated with their troops, abandoning Prince Rares, who saw Moldavia isolated and the destruction of his plans. The inefficacy of the anti-Ottoman alliance with Ferdinand of Habsburg and the betrayal of the Moldavian boyars, who submissively supported the sultan, forced Rares to give up the Moldavian throne and flee to Transylvania. The triumphant sultan entered Suceava without resistance and took Rares' native treasure, the riches of which, as the Ottoman chronicler wrote, "the author's pen could not describe."⁶⁰

1.3.2. Rares' Exile

Rares recognized that he had been driven from power, not only because of internal betrayal or the lack of his allies' support, but primarily because he was abandoned even by his own 'faithful' boyars,⁶¹ who preferred to submit to the sultan (for he promised them forgiveness) instead of following their prince into exile. Rares was pursued by the treacherous boyars, by the soldiers of Prince Stephen Lacusta, who was appointed to the Moldavian throne by the sultan, and by bounty hunters who wanted to claim the reward promised by the sultan for Rares' head.⁶² The prince was obliged to travel at night and on unbeaten and hidden paths. His small group of supporters was discovered by Lacusta's soldiers, and, during the confrontation, many of them lost their lives, as did one of his sons,

⁵⁹ Mihail Gubogiu and Mustafa Mehmet, ed., *Cronici turcesti privind tarile romane (Turkish Chronicles Concerning the Romanian Principalities)*, vol. 1 (sec. xv-xvii) (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Academiei, 1966), p. 262.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁶² Constantin Rezachevici, "Pribegia lui Petru Rares (Petru Rares' Exile)," in *Petru Rares*, edited by Leon Simanschi (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1978), p. 184.

while Rares himself barely escaped alive.⁶³ He tried to hide in several fortresses but did not receive permission to enter any of them. In the Piatra Neamt fortress, a priest reportedly caught the prince. In order to escape, Rares killed him.⁶⁴ Some documents mention that the priest tried to kill Rares, and the people chased the priest away who three days later ended up killing himself.⁶⁵

The now in exile Prince Rares finally found shelter at the Bistrita monastery, where “he was received with love.”⁶⁶ “I entered in the church,” said the prince, “and I fell down on my knees in front of the holy icons and I cried much, and with me the abbot and the entire monastery shed bitter tears.”⁶⁷ However, the soldiers of Lacusta surrounded the monastery, and Rares was obliged to flee, this time alone, without servants, food or money. Lost in woods and in despair, he thought that his end was near. At that moment, he met a hermit who showed him the way to another monastery, where he would find another welcoming shelter.⁶⁸ Several days later, the prince journeyed toward Ciceu, a town in Transylvania that belonged at that time to him. After a long and dangerous journey, he crossed the border between Moldavia and Transylvania and, disguised as a peasant, arrived at Ciceu.⁶⁹

In Ciceu, Rares met the rest of his family, including his wife Elena and their two sons, who were waiting for him since their flight from Suceava, when Suleiman started the

⁶³ During his exile, two of Rares’ sons were with him. For detailed information see: Rezachevici, “Pribegia lui Petru Rares,” p. 185.

⁶⁴ Neculce, *op.cit.*, p. 13; Ureche, *Letopisetul*, p. 144.

⁶⁵ Constantin Rezachevici, “Pribegia Lui Petru Rares (Petru Rares' Exile),” in *Petru Rares*, p. 185.

⁶⁶ Bogdan, Ioan and P.P. Panaitescu eds., *Cronicile slavo-romane din sec.xv-xvi (The Slav-Romanian Chronicles XV-XVI Centuries)* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Academiei, 1959), p. 99.

⁶⁷ Constantin Rezachevici, “Pribegia Lui Petru Rares (Petru Rares' Exile),” in *Petru Rares*, p. 186.

⁶⁸ Nicolae Costin, *Letopisetul Tarii Moldovei de la zidirea lumii pina la 1601 si de la 1709 la 1711 (The Moldavian Chronicle from the Beginning of the World until 1601 and from 1709 to 1711)*, edited by C. A. Stoide (Iasi, Romania: Editura Junimea, 1976), p. 162.

⁶⁹ Ureche, *Chronique de Moldavie*, p. 145.

campaign against Moldavia.⁷⁰ The hope that he would finally be safe at Ciceu vanished quickly as Rares was again the victim of an internal plot. This time the conspirators were the prefect of the citadel and the bishop, Anastasie of Vad, both of whom were faithful to Stephen Lacusta. The citadel was attacked not only by Lacusta's soldiers, but also by John Zápolya (1526-1540), the prince of Transylvania. Finally, the fortress was not occupied by the soldiers of Stephen Lacusta, but by John Zápolya supported by the Turks, who entered the fortress before Lacusta's soldiers and took Rares prisoner.⁷¹

Prince Rares was not resigned to his fate. He began negotiations with John Zápolya to free and to help him regain the Moldavian throne. He also asked Ferdinand to support in this feat, but he quickly realized that they would not help him and that the only one who could help was Suleiman himself.⁷² Approaching the sultan was not easy. Although Suleiman asked him to do so, Zápolya did not want to send Rares to Constantinople. Nevertheless, Rares eventually arrived at Constantinople. There are two historical accounts about the arrival of Rares to Constantinople.⁷³ In the first, we find that Zápolya finally handed over the exiled prince only after being asked eight times by the sultan to send him to Constantinople. In the second, we find, on the one hand, Rares himself secretly writing to Suleiman and inquiring about the possibility of being received in Constantinople, and, on the other hand, Suleiman agreeing. The only object that Rares took with him from Ciceu was *The Book of the Gospels*, produced during the reign of his father at Putna monastery and donated to the old Humor Monastery. Paisie, the abbot of the newly reconstructed monastery (during Rares' first reign), sent the book to Ciceu in 1538.

⁷⁰ Rezachevici, "Pribegia Lui Petru Rares," p. 190.

⁷¹ Rezachevici, "Pribegia Lui Petru Rares," p. 191.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 192-193.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 193.

When Rares became, for a second time, prince of Moldavia, he returned the *Gospels* to the Humor Monastery.⁷⁴

Understanding that the Christian world would not help him, Rares decided to ask the sultan to support him in reclaiming the Moldavian throne again. Although the sultan changed his mind about killing Rares, he did not forgive him either.⁷⁵ At the same time in Suceava, Rares' enemy, Stephen Lacusta, was killed by boyars and replaced with Alexandru Cornea, a situation the sultan did not like. This all worked to the exiled prince's advantage as the sultan decided to reconsider Rares' return to power. Consequently, in 1541, Rares received from Suleiman the seal of investiture to the throne of Moldavia, this time submissive to Ottoman power.⁷⁶

1.3.3. The Second Reign (1541-1546)

Prince Rares was welcomed at Suceava especially by the ordinary people. They hoped the prince would protect them against the boyars' abuses.⁷⁷ Upon his return to Moldavia, Rares punished the leaders of the boyars who betrayed him and forgave all those who submitted to the Ottomans out of fear or for material advantage. With the sultan's approval, the leaders of the boyars, who favored the Ottoman side in 1538, were executed.⁷⁸

The cost of this second reign was very high. Rares had to pay yearly a large amount of money to the Ottoman Porte, as the Ottomans had already instituted the policy of selling

⁷⁴ Ion Bogdan, "Evangheliile de la Humor si Voronet din 1473 si 1550" (The Gospels from Humor and Voronet 1473 and 1550), *Analele Academiei Romane* 29 (1907), p. 649.

⁷⁵ Stefan S. Gorovei, *Petru Rares*, pp. 174-175.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁷⁸ Rezachevici, "Pribegia lui Petru Rares," p. 209.

appointments to the highest bidder throughout the Balkans. He also had to send one of his sons to reside in Constantinople as a guarantee of his new allegiance. Suleiman also said he would send to Moldavia an Ottoman garrison to control the prince's movements, and Rares had to report back to the Porte every three years. Actually, there was no Ottoman garrison in Moldavia, and Rares never returned to Constantinople.⁷⁹ During his second reign, Moldavia's relations with all its neighbors were improved. Rares learned from his first reign, and especially from the experience of the year 1538, to remain in good relations with the sultan, thus not endangering his reign and his country. He also learned to be more discrete in his relations with other Christian countries interested in anti-Ottoman alliances, at least until the day when they could successfully attack the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁰

Rares's internal policy, after he killed the leaders of the boyars who betrayed him, was characterized by considerable lenience. He forgave a number of boyars who submitted to the sultan in 1538, but dismissed them from the political positions which they held. He started collaborating with the rest of the boyars, especially the young ones, regardless of the positions they occupied during Lacusta's reign.⁸¹ Prince Rares' second reign lasted only five years, from 1541 to 1546. He died in 1546 after a long illness and was entombed at the church of Probota monastery, the necropolis of his family.⁸²

⁷⁹ Iorga, *op.cit.*, p. 324; Gorovei, *op.cit.*, p. 184.

⁸⁰ Iorga, *op.cit.*, p. 325; Rezachevici, "Pribegia lui Petru Rares," p. 264.

⁸¹ Rezachevici, "Pribegia lui Petru Rares," p. 228.

⁸²Chronicler Ureche records that he was mourned by the whole population because he was a "merciful father and a good shepherd for his flock." Yet, he did not mention the feelings the families of the killed boyars had for prince Rares. Ureche, *Letopisetul*, p. 119.

1.3.4. Conclusion

Prince Rares' legacy, like his own personality, was paradoxical. He had tasted the sweetness of political glory and the bitterness of exile. He was loved by many and betrayed by others. He could have died on different occasions, poisoned like his predecessor, murdered like his followers in the woods during his exile, or killed by the sultan or by his own imprudence, personal ambitions, and love for power. He went through dangers, many of which were caused by his naive and unattainable ideals. However that may be, he managed to survive, finally dying in his own country and among his own people. One has to remember that he confronted the Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent himself, called by the European princes: The "King of Kings", "great, invincible and bright King of Jerusalem, Egypt..." (there follows the enumeration of more than fifteen countries).⁸³ Rares tried to oppose the Ottomans for Moldavia's and, indeed, Europe's freedom. While he did not succeed, he nevertheless entered Romanian history as a prince who tried to preserve his country's independence. Finally, he accepted Ottoman overrule, proving his flexibility to changing circumstances, or his readiness to pay the price to be prince. However, flexible or corrupt, Rares encouraged art to flourish under his reign. No wonder that art historians called him the prince of Moldavian art.⁸⁴ He paid special attention to the monasteries, giving money for their reconstruction, for embellishing their churches and for erecting new ones. It is precisely this patronage of the arts and the innovations that flourished during his reign that calls for careful consideration.

⁸³ Mustafa Mehmet, ed., *Documente Turcesti Privind Istoria Romaniei (Turkish Documents Regarding the Romanian History)* vol. I (1455-1774) (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1976), p. 29.

⁸⁴ Paul Henry, *op.cit.*, p. 158.

2. MOLDAVIAN CHURCH INNOVATIONS UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF PRINCE RARES

2.1. Introductory Remarks

Rares did not inherit his father's diplomatic skills, political ability, or his cold-blooded capacity for expediency, but he did inherit the military talent and the desire for his country's independence. Besides these political attributes, he was educated, he had a deep sense of piety, and he was an art lover and protector. An important influence on his cultural formation was his numerous travels to European countries.⁸⁵ One can see the influences of western art in his fortress of Suceava, which was comparable in sumptuousness and cosmopolitanism to those of Europe, and also in the churches' frescoes.⁸⁶

Under the rule of Prince Rares, Moldavian iconography reached its climax, as did church architecture under the rulership of his father Stephen the Great.⁸⁷ During Stephen's reign, churches and monasteries were erected in Moldavian style of great originality and stylistic unity, developed by blending Gothic elements within the Byzantine structure specific to the churches. Church architecture, which was on decline after Stephen's death, also experienced a rebirth during Petru Rares' reign. Keeping the architectural tradition of his father's time, Rares hired master masons from amongst Moldavian natives and Saxons from Bistrita in Transylvania, and he contributed his own new vision for the churches.⁸⁸ Together with his cousin, Bishop Grigorie Rosca, he asked the iconographers to cover with elaborate frescoes not only the churches' interior walls, but also the exterior walls. These

⁸⁵ Vasile Dragut, *Humor* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Meridiane, 1973), p. 21.

⁸⁶ Sorin Dumitrescu, *Chivotele Lui Petru Rares Si Modelul Lor Ceresc (Rares' Shrines and Their Heavenly Models)* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Anastasia, 2001), p. 387; Dragut, *Humor*, pp. 9-10.

⁸⁷ Henry, *op.cit.*, p. 159.

⁸⁸ Pacurariu, *op.cit.*, p. 587.

exterior frescoes, masterpieces of mural painting, represent a unique artistic phenomenon in post-Byzantine art.

In 1993, due to the uniqueness of their exterior frescoes, seven churches were classified as UNESCO patrimony. While three of these churches, Humor, Moldovita and Probota, were erected and painted during Rares' reign, two others, Arbore and Suceava, were erected during that of his father and were decorated on the exterior walls during his own. Only one of them, Sucevita monastic church, was erected later, and Voronet monastic church's exterior walls were painted one year after Rares' death. These are not the only churches erected or painted during Prince Rares' reign. He was, in fact, the founder of many other churches and monasteries (as will be presented below), and, at the same time, he encouraged the boyars to do the same.

In the following sections, I deal with the most representative churches erected or painted during Prince Rares' reign. Before focusing on political aspects of the exterior frescoes of Humor and Moldavita churches, I shall concentrate on highlighting monasteries and churches that are representative of Rares' reign (in their chronological order of construction).

First, I chose the church of Dobrovat monastery. It was the last church erected by Stephen the Great and the first to be commissioned by Petru Rares. Second, I chose the church of Probota monastery, which was erected as the necropolis for the prince's family. Finally, I examine the church of Moldovita monastery which, in my opinion, is the most beautiful church erected during Rares' reign. On the map inserted below one can locate the churches of the several Moldavian monasteries: Probota, Moldavita, Humor, etc. The church of Dobrovat monastery did not appear on the map because it is located in Iasi

country, whereas the others are located in Suceava country.⁸⁹ At the end of the section, a chronological list can be found of all the churches or monastic establishments erected during Rares' reign.



Picture 1 Map with the Churches of Several Monasteries in Northern Moldavia

2.2. The Church of Dobrovat Monastery

Two years after Rares was first enthroned, he commissioned iconographers to paint the interior walls of the Dobrovat monastic church. Dedicated to the *Descent of the Holy Spirit* (the Pentecost), this church was constructed between 1503 and 1504.⁹⁰ It was the last church commissioned by Stephen the Great, but he did not live to see the project

⁸⁹ The map is from the CD “The Holy Monastery of Humor”, which I was offered by the nuns of Humor monastery. The CD was created and designed by Andrei Savescu, internet address: <http://www.savescu.com/>

⁹⁰ In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there were chiseled in stone on the exterior walls of Moldavian churches inscriptions with the name of the founder, the year of the construction, and other historical information.

completed. The monastic complex was finished by his son Bogdan III, who followed Stephen on the Moldavian throne. The church's frescoes were painted in 1527, when the ruler of Moldavia was Prince Rares. Later, in 1651, the Moldavian Prince of that time, Vasile Lupu, dedicated Dobrovat Monastery to the Zographou Monastery, which is situated on Mount Athos.⁹¹ This was a practice frequently embraced by rulers in Romania and other Eastern European countries at the time to show their piety publicly. The Moldavian monastery was subject to the Athonite Monastery until 1863. During this period Dobrovat was pillaged by Tatars in 1658, by Turks in 1739, during the Hetaerist anti-Ottoman emancipation movement in 1822, and lastly in 1864. Between 1865 and 1900, Dobrovat monastery was transformed into a prison. Between 1900 and 1903, it was an orphanage for girls, and from 1903 to 1930, it was an agriculture school. From 1930 until 1948, it was a monastery, and then it was again transformed into a school by the communist regime that ruled Romania until 1989. Finally, in 1990 it became once again a monastery, as it was meant to be when it was constructed.

The iconographic plan, completed during Rares' reign, displays innovative frescoes that are not mentioned in Byzantine canons of church paintings. In fact, the new way of painting the churches, on both the interior and exterior walls, characterizes the reign of Prince Rares alone. At Dobrovat, one can observe unique frescoes depicting the miracle of Saint Athanasius from Athos, the miracle of Saint Sabba, and the ladder of Saint John of Sinai, to mention only a few. On the right side of the narthex wall, there is a votive painting with Stephen the Great, Bogdan III and Petru Rares, founders of the monastery. One of the oldest portraits of Petru Rares is in this painting.

⁹¹ All this historical information is available at Dobrovat Monastery itself.



Picture 2 Church of Dobrovat monastery - votive painting

2.3. The Church of Probota Monastery

In 1530, a new church was erected at Probota monastery. It was painted with interior and exterior frescoes in 1532. Until the construction of Probota, Putna monastery, the necropolis of Stephen the Great and his family, was the cultural center of Moldavia. Although Rares at first respected the primacy of Putna monastery (his first wife, who died in 1529, was buried there), after he built Probota monastery in 1530, Putna lost its primacy. The church of Probota then became the necropolis of Rares' family, and the monastery also became one of the new literary centers of Moldavia alongside the Humor monastery.⁹² The Prince decided to change the family necropolis from Putna to Probota on the advice of his

⁹²Emil Turdeanu and E. D. Tappe, "Centres of Literary Activity in Moldavia, 1504-1552," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 34 (1955), p. 108.

cousin Grigorie Rosca, who was abbot at Probota monastery between 1523 and 1546.⁹³

The monks of Putna protested the decisions of Prince Rares to change the family necropolis and the literary center, and there is a document from 1563 that describes that protest.⁹⁴

However, the monks' protest was ineffectual, because the prince's decision was final.

The church of Probota is one of the most important achievements of Romanian architecture and is representative of sixteenth-century Moldavia. The outside painting is greatly compromised due to many factors, most seriously being weather erosion.

Ironically, the interior painting was preserved 'thanks' to the several layers of over-paint the walls received during the eighteenth and nineteenth century attempts at restoration.

Between 1996 and 2001, UNESCO, in collaboration with the Romanian Ministry of Culture and the financial support of the Japanese Trust Fund for the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage, established an international restoration team to revive Probota's frescoes.⁹⁵ They removed the successive layers of the over-paint to reveal the exceptional sixteenth century iconographic display, with original approaches to the canonical themes that make these frescoes unique in Moldavia.

Analyzing Probota's frescoes is not the purpose of this dissertation. However, it is worth mentioning at least one fresco that is unique and that was never used in the iconography of the display of Orthodox churches.⁹⁶ During the restoration work, there was discovered in the altar a depiction of fourteen hierarchs and two deacons, from the first Christian centuries, contemplating Christ's sacrifice. In place of the Christ-Child laying on

⁹³ Pacurariu, *op.cit.*, p. 471.

⁹⁴ The letter of the archbishop Gregory is in: Mihail Roller, *Documente Privind Istoria Romaniei: A: Moldova* (Bucharest, Romania, 1954), pp. 168-169.

⁹⁵ For more information on the restoration programme for Probota monastery, see the UNESCO website: <http://www.unesco.emb-japan.go.jp/htm/probota.htm>.

⁹⁶ Ciobanu, "Sursele Literare," p. 323.

the liturgical diskos (or paten), there are two severed forearms. Next to the diskos stands St. John Chrysostom holding in his right hand a small knife and in his left hand an adult Christ, depicted in miniature, with his arms severed. The image refers to the *proskomedía* and is a visual explication of the idea of liturgical sacrifice where the bread and wine are changed into the very Body and Blood of Christ by the descent of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁷ The Liturgy of St. Basil, composed in the fourth century, was initially used in Orthodox Church services.⁹⁸ In the fifth century, St. John Chrysostom composed another liturgy, which is not radically different from that of St. Basil. They differ mainly in the prayers, called the *Anaphora*, as well as in some of the songs that are sung during the liturgy, and in the liturgy's length, with that of St. John Chrysostom being shorter.⁹⁹ Gradually St. Basil's liturgy was replaced by that of St. John, which is used throughout the year. By contrast, the Liturgy of St. Basil was (and is) used only ten times each year: on Christmas Eve, Saint Basil's feast day (January 1), the eve of the Theophany (January 5), the five Sundays of Great Lent, Holy Thursday, and Holy Saturday (the day before Easter). The iconographers who painted Probota depicted St. John Chrysostom as sacrificing Christ and not St. Basil, as is often seen in iconography. This feature of the icon is probably due to the greater frequency of Orthodox usage of the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.

Although the fresco is appreciated as unique for its Orthodox iconography, it is problematic from the theological point of view, because in the Eucharist, Christ is whole and not divided as the fresco depicts him. St. Nicholas Cabasilas explains that, in Eucharist, the Lamb of God (Christ), who "is broken and distributed, but not sundered", always fed

⁹⁷ The *Proskomedía* is a service in the Orthodox Church for the preparation of liturgical gifts (the bread and wine), which is performed before the Liturgy.

⁹⁸ Hugh Wybrew, *The Orthodox Liturgy: the Development of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Byzantine Rite* (Crestwood, N.K.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), pp. 54-61.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

upon but never consumed, is the sanctification of those who partake of him.¹⁰⁰ Hence, the canonical depiction has the whole Christ Child placed on the diskos and not merely his severed forearms.¹⁰¹



Picture 3 The Church of Probota monastery - altar – St. John Chrysostom sacrificing Christ¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ On the theology of the Eucharist, see: Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, J.M Hussey and P.A McNulty, transl. (London, UK: SPCK, 1960), pp. 18 and 81-82.

¹⁰¹ For the depiction of the Christ Child on the altar's walls, see: Paul Hetherington transl. *The Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Fourni* (Torrance, California: Oakwood Publication, 1996), p. 505 (465).

¹⁰² It should be mentioned that, in the Orthodox Church, women are not allowed to enter the altar (sanctuary) (except in the case of a monastery's abbess). I was able to take this picture thanks to the help of abbess of Probota monastery.

2.4. The church of Moldovita Monastery

The exact date of the establishment of Moldovita Monastery is not known. Local legend has it that, during the fourteenth century, many hermits, living in the surrounding woods, had built a wooden church there. By contrast, documentary sources indicate that a stone church existed during the reign of Alexandru cel Bun (1400-1432) and that a Galician artist worked there.¹⁰³ This first complex was damaged by a landslide and fell into ruins. Its remains can still be seen next to the present monastery, which was built in 1532 by Petru Rares.

The architectural plan of the church of Moldovita is similar to that of the church of Humor, but with this difference: the nave at Humor is covered by a simple cupola, whereas at Moldovita there is a high tower, circular inside and octagonal on the outside above the nave. These two churches have a secret chamber located above to the so called *gropnita* (burial chamber), an open porch, and Gothic windows and doors, which are innovations in Moldavian architecture. The church of Moldovita monastery is probably the most beautiful church erected during Prince Rares' reign and has the best-preserved exterior paintings.

¹⁰³ Henry, *op.cit.*, p. 45.



Picture 4 The church of Moldovita Monastery

When painting the frescoes on the exterior walls, iconographers had total freedom, since in the Orthodox Church there are no canons for what is to be painted on exterior walls.¹⁰⁴ The artistic program at Humor and Moldavita is very similar. On the southern walls, there are two major compositions: the *Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God* with the *Fall of Constantinople*, and the *Tree of Jesse* coupled with a group of ancient philosophers.¹⁰⁵ The *Tree of Jesse* illustrates the genealogy of Jesus Christ and is flanked in vertical bands along the sides by a group of ancient historians and philosophers: Thucydides, Homer, Aristotle, Arstarchus, Plato, the Sybil, Porphyry, Socrates, Aristokritus and Plutarch.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ The Moldavian churches painted on the exterior walls are unique in the entire world.

¹⁰⁵ The name *Akathistos* derives from the fact that when the ‘kontakion’ of the Annunciation entered liturgical usage (at Matins of the Fifth Saturday of lent), it replaced the kathismata of Matins, which meant that it was an ‘a-kathistos’ service. About the representation of *Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God* connected with the *Fall of Constantinople*, see below: “The Influence of Prince Rares’ Political Vision on the Exterior Churches’ frescoes at Humor and Moldovita Monasteries.”

¹⁰⁶ For the name of the philosophers depicted see: Michael D. Taylor, “A Historiated Tree of Jesse,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 34 (1980 - 1981), p. 135.

The origin of this fresco on the walls of Moldavian churches has been debated by scholars.¹⁰⁷ In 1913, the art historian Josef Strzygowski argued that the depiction of the *Tree of Jesse* coupled with the ancient philosophers at two monasteries on Mount Athos (the Great Lavra and Dochiariou), should be seen as a Moldavian influence on the Athonite churches.¹⁰⁸ Romanian scholar Grigorie Nandris held the same view.¹⁰⁹ The art historian Paul Henry maintained the opposite view, insisting that the Athonite depiction influenced the Moldavian one.¹¹⁰

These two different opinions existed because of a wrong dating of the fresco of the *Tree of Jesse* at the refectory of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos. It was considered to be 1512 instead of the correct 1536.¹¹¹ The other fresco depicting the *Tree of Jesse* is at Dochiariou, another Athonite monastery, and was painted in 1568.¹¹² Therefore, there could not have been an Athonite influence on Moldavian representation, but vice-versa since the Moldavian monastic church of Humor was painted in 1535, before the two Athonite churches, and the church of Moldovita monastery was painted in 1537 with the same exterior fresco program as that of the Humor monastic church. The Moldavian school of iconography had to be very influential during the sixteenth century since it inspired even the talented iconographers of Mount Athos (at least for the fresco of the *Tree of Jesse*).¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ For the literary source of the fresco and its history, see Ciobanu, "Sursele Literare," pp. 110-289.

¹⁰⁸ Ciobanu translated from German to Romanian Strzygowski's argument of the Moldavian influence on Athonite iconography. Ciobanu, "Sursele Literare," p. 262.

¹⁰⁹ Wladyslaw Podlacha and Grigore Nandris, *Umanismul Picturii Murale Postbizantine (The Humanism of the Post-Byzantine Mural Painting)*, vol. 1 (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Meridiane, 1985), p. 85.

¹¹⁰ Paul Henry, "L'arbre de Jessé dans les églises de Bukovine," in *Bibliothèque de l'Institut Français des Hautes Etudes en Roumanie, II Mélanges 1928* (Bucharest, Romania, 1929), p. 29.

¹¹¹ Taylor, "A Historiated Tree of Jesse," p. 129.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ The existence of a Moldavian school of iconography is argued by Ion Solocanu, "Realizari Artistice (Artistic Achievements)" in *Petru Rares*, edited by Leon Simanschi (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1978), p. 195.

During Rares' reign the painters applied a similar iconographic program both for the interior and exterior of all churches' walls. Vasile Dragut suggests that there was a school of iconography and that the iconographers were Moldavian masters who drew their inspiration from the Byzantine artistic tradition.¹¹⁴ Paul Henry asserts that in choosing the themes for the frescoes, the iconographers were influenced specifically by the Athonite School of iconography.¹¹⁵ However, the Athonite School was influenced in turn by the Moldavian School of iconography, as I have argued above, thus witnessing to the reciprocity of the influences between the two schools.¹¹⁶

2.5. Other Churches and Monastic Establishments Constructed During Rares' Reign

The prolific work for religious edifices, during the reign of Prince Rares, is not limited to the churches mentioned above. He encouraged the boyars to continue constructing churches and monasteries in Moldavia and on Mount Athos. Thus, in 1530, the church of Saint George in Harlau village was established and a new church which was painted with interior and exterior frescoes in 1535 was erected at Humor monastery. In 1532, in the same year that the new church at Moldovita monastery was constructed, another church was erected and painted in Baia village. Alongside these Romanian accomplishments, in 1533, Rares sent to Mount Athos important donations for churches to be rebuilt, especially to the Chilandariou and Konstamonitou monasteries.¹¹⁷ The following year, in 1534, the metropolitan church, St. George in Suceava, was decorated with interior and exterior frescoes.

¹¹⁴ Dragut, *Humor*, p. 32.

¹¹⁵ Henry, *op.cit.*, p. 193.

¹¹⁶ For more on the Moldavian school of iconography, see the section: "The Painters of Humor monastery."

¹¹⁷ Anca Vasiliu, *Monastères de Moldavie xiv^e - xvi^e: Les architectures de l'image* (Paris-Bucharest: Méditerranée –Humanitas, 1988), p. 322.

From a religious perspective, the most prolific year during Rares' reign was 1535. In this year, many churches were built, reconstructed, or painted. For example, there was: the construction of the church of Saint Demetrius in Suceava, which was decorated with exterior and interior frescoes two years later; the establishment of the church of Saint Demetrius at Harlau; the construction of the church of Saint Nicolas at the Cosula monastery, which was also painted on the exterior and interior walls two years later. The same year, Prince Rares helped with financial donations a number of monasteries on Mount Athos.¹¹⁸ As a result of the prince's generosity, the monastery Karakalou was reconstructed, and the big church of Dionysiou monastery was fitted and decorated with frescoes.¹¹⁹

As presented above, between 1538 and 1540, Rares was in exile, but in 1541, when he became once again the prince of Moldavia, the construction of the churches resumed. Subsequently, in 1542, with the collaboration of Bishop Macarie, the Rasca monastery was built, and in 1552, its church was decorated with interior and exterior frescoes. The last two establishments erected during Rares' second reign were the Episcopal Church of Roman and the Capriana Monastery.

2.6. Conclusion

While Prince Rares loved and appreciated the entire Moldavian heritage and wanted to preserve the tradition of Moldavian church architecture, he also knew how to encourage the integration of new artistic perspectives into a cultural heritage. The results can be seen in the exterior frescoes of the churches which continue to amaze viewers. Although the

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

exterior frescoes had an iconic program, the personal ambitions of Prince Rares influenced the iconographers with the result of the insertion in the frescoes of the Prince's political aspirations. The most convincing example of this is the fresco of the *Fall of Constantinople*, which was introduced in the fresco series depicting the *Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God*. The *Fall of Constantinople* is pictured on three frescoes: at the churches of Humor and Moldovita monasteries, painted during the first reign of Prince Rares, and on the exterior wall of the Arbore monastic church, painted during his second reign. In the following section, I will analyze the *Fall of Constantinople* on the exterior frescoes as an illustration of the influence which Rares' political aspirations had on iconographers.

3. THE IMPACT OF PRINCE RARES' POLITICAL VISION ON THE EXTERIOR CHURCH FRESCOES AT HUMOR AND MOLDOVITA MONASTERIES

3.1. Introduction

During Rares' reign, the major political threat to his country came from the Ottomans. The Moldavian prince's political message against the Ottoman Turks found its place in the exterior frescoes of the churches of Humor and Moldovita monasteries, precisely the fresco of the *Fall of Constantinople*. In what follows, I will provide three interpretations of this fresco: the first interpretation sees in the fresco not the historical *Fall of Constantinople*, but rather the hope for the victory of the Byzantines (depicted as Moldavians) over the Ottomans; the second interprets the *Fall of Constantinople*, holistically, in the context of a fresco series; the third interpretation is connected with a graffito inserted into the fresco. The first two interpretations are put forward by contemporary scholars, whereas the third belongs to a sixteenth century anonymous commentator who was critical of the lack of historical veracity in the depiction of the *Fall of Constantinople* as a victory of the Byzantines over the Ottomans Turks.

3.2. The First Interpretation of the Fresco Representing the *Fall of Constantinople*

The scene of the *Fall of Constantinople*, has given rise to varying interpretations. Confused by the appearances (the costumes of the sixteenth-century Turks and use of artillery by both armies) some Romanian scholars have argued that the representation of the *Fall of Constantinople* (1453) depicted as a victory by the iconographers is based on a lack of historical knowledge. Some interpreters point to the fresco from Arbore monastic

church as the exception, which, in their view, was painted by more educated iconographers who explicitly depicted the siege of Constantinople of 626 rather than that of 1453.¹²⁰

According to André Grabar, none of the sixteenth-century princes, patrons of art, would accept the painting of one of the major disasters of the Christian world on a church fresco.¹²¹ However, the origin of the depiction of the *Fall of Constantinople* as a victory for Byzantines must have a more suitable explanation than the iconographers' lack of historical knowledge of a disaster of such proportions.

The scene of the battle for Constantinople from the Humor and Moldovita monastic churches is part of a larger fresco, which illustrates the *Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God*. In its first part, the text mentions the victory of the Byzantines over the Persians in 626, attributed to a miracle-working icon of the Mother of God. The authorship and the year when the *Akathistos Hymn* was composed, in which an allusion to a siege is referred, are the subject of ongoing scholarly discussion. Though scholars agree that the hymn was composed in honor of Mary, there are different opinions about its authorship. Some attribute it to George Pisida, a seventh-century Byzantine poet, others to the Patriarch of Constantinople Sergius (Patriarch between 610 and 638), while still others to Romanus Melodus, the Byzantine church poet (died circa 560 in Constantinople).¹²² There are also differences concerning the dating of the hymn. Many maintain that it was written in 626 when the Byzantines miraculously won the battle against the Persians and the city of Constantinople was saved. However, there are scholars who associate the hymn with one of

¹²⁰ Ciobanu in his PhD dissertation describes the scholarly discussions concerning the Fall of Constantinople depicted in Moldavian churches. Ciobanu, "Sursele Literare," pp. 17-22.

¹²¹ André Grabar, *L'art de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Age*, vol. 1 (Paris: Collège de France, 1968), p. 73.

¹²² G.M. Proxorov, "A Codicological Analysis of the Illuminated Akathistos to the Virgin, Moscow, State Historical Museum," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 26 (1972), pp. 237-252.

the later sieges, such as those of the years 677, 717, or even 860.¹²³ Over the course of the centuries, Constantinople was threatened by Avars, Slavs, Arabs and Russians, yet the city resisted because, as believers held and as the *Akathistos Hymn* writes, the Mother of God protected “her” city.

In the Orthodox Church the resistance of Constantinople, which became part of the *Akathistos Hymn*, is interpreted as a perpetual protection of the Mother of God over unbelievers. This is due to the fact that the hymn does not refer to a specific siege, and because only the first *kontakion* alludes to a victory, the rest being pure devotion to the Mother of God.¹²⁴ The reason why some scholars associate the hymn to one of the sieges lies in the history of the liberation of Constantinople mentioned in the *Triodion*, a liturgical book, as well as in the *Synaxarion*, a book describing the life of the Orthodox saints and of liturgical feasts.¹²⁵ If the *Akathistos* ought to be dated immediately after the battle of 626, as many scholars argue, the question arises, how the hymn could be composed in one day to be sung by the crowd during the night after the withdrawal of the enemy. A more plausible explanation is that the *Akathistos Hymn* was composed over centuries of Marian devotion. The cult of the Mother of God and its hymnography has grown in the years following the Council of Ephesus, and hence the *Akathistos Hymn* is likely the product of many years of devotion.¹²⁶

¹²³ Egon Wellesz, “The Akathistos. A Study in Byzantine Hymnography,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9 (1956), p. 144.

¹²⁴ The Akathistos hymn is divided into thirteen parts, each of which has a *kontakion* and an *oikos*. The *kontakion* usually describes an event from the life of the saint to which the Akathistos is addressed and ends with the exclamation, “Alleluia!”, whereas an *oikos* is an anaphoric request or praise.

¹²⁵ Egon Wellesz, “The Akathistos,” p. 144.

¹²⁶ The Council of Ephesus in 431 stated that the Virgin Mary was to be called the Theotokos because she bore and gave birth to God as a man.

The hymn is divided into thirteen parts and the prologue (the *Prooemion*) exists in two forms.¹²⁷ The first form begins with the narration of an angel who visits St. Joseph's house and addresses the Virgin Mary as “bride unwedded.” The second form begins by telling how the City (Constantinople) was freed from danger by the Mother of God. It explains:

To you, our leader in battle and defender,
 O *Theotokos* (Mother of God), I, your city, delivered from sufferings,
 ascribe hymns of victory and thanksgiving.
 Since you are invincible in power, free me from all kinds of dangers,
 that I may cry to you: “Hail, bride unwedded.”¹²⁸

Constantin Ciobanu argued that the *Prooemion* does not explain the complex depiction of the *Fall of Constantinople* on Moldavian frescos. In his opinion, this fresco, even though it is part of the *Akathistos Hymn*, has as its literary source the ninth century anonymous homily “*Hymnus Acathistus; De obsidione Constantinopolis*”¹²⁹ Despite of Ciobanu’s argument, the majority of scholars who have examined this fresco hold that the literary source of the depiction is actually the *Prooemion* of the *Akathistos Hymn*.¹³⁰

At Humor and Moldovita monasteries (painted during the first reign of Prince Rares) the depiction of the text had been changed. Instead of the battle of 626, there is painted the *Fall of Constantinople* in 1453. Moreover, contrary to the outcome of this latter historical event, the Byzantines are made victors. This distortion of historical truth was the impact of the influence on iconographers of Prince Rares’s personal ambition to be the

¹²⁷ Wellesz, “The Akathistos,” p. 144.

¹²⁸ Leena Mari Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn* (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2001), p. 21.

¹²⁹ Ciobanu, “Sursele Literare,” p. 38.

¹³⁰ Sorin Ules, “La peinture extérieure moldave: où, quand et comment est-elle apparue?,” *Revue roumaine d’histoire* (1984) : 297-298; André Grabar, “Un graffite slave sur la façade d’une église de Bucovine,” in *L’art de la fin de l’antiquité et du Moyen Âge* (Paris, France: Collège de France, 1968), p. 74; Anca Vasiliu, *op.cit.*, p. 246 note 104.

liberator of Constantinople and of Byzantium. Hence, the Moldavian iconographers adapted the theme of the *Akathistos Hymn*, and implicitly the scene of the *Fall of Constantinople*, to the contemporary events in their country, changing it into a national invocation: in the same way that the Virgin helped the Byzantines, she will help the Moldavians to resist the Ottoman attacks.¹³¹ Therefore, the fresco is not only the image of the ‘victorious’ Constantinople, it is by extension that of the ‘victorious’ Moldavia.

The church of Humor Monastery painted exteriorly in 1535 has the depiction of the *Akathistos Hymn* well preserved, but that of the *Fall of Constantinople* is in a very advanced stage of decay. The church of Moldovita monastery, exteriorly painted in 1537, has the fresco of the *Fall of Constantinople* better preserved. The two monasteries were apparently painted by the same group of iconographers since the exterior frescoes are very similar, indeed almost identical.

¹³¹ Paul Henry, *op.cit.*, p. 241; Sorin Ulea, “Originea si semnificatia ideologica a picturii exterioare moldovenesti,” *SCIA* (1963), p. 72.



Picture 5 The Fall of Constantinople – the Church of Humor Monastery



Picture 6: The Fall of Constantinople – the Church of Moldovita Monastery

In the middle of both images, the city of Constantinople is shown surrounded by walls and towers for defending its palaces, its churches and its houses. In the foreground are portraits of three bishops holding the Gospel, a cross and the veil of the *Theotokos*. The bishop with the veil is not related to the siege of 626, nor to that of 1453, but to an episode from the Russ-Byzantine siege in 860. This was when the Patriarch Photius asked the defenders to trust in God and the Virgin who would not abandon ‘her’ city. He soaked the veil in the water of Bosphorus that a storm might come to destroy the enemy fleet. At Humor, the fleet depicted on the left is intact, whereas at Moldovita all the ships had been destroyed.

On the upper level of the fresco is a religious procession, with the icon of the Mother of God *Hodegetria* - She who shows the Way - and the Mandylion - the icon not made by human hands.¹³² The archbishops carried with them the treasure of the Orthodox Church: Scripture and Tradition, the two ways by which the divine revelation and its interpretation are communicated to the Church. Tradition is indicated here by the icon of the Mother of God, the Mandylion, Mary’s veil and the cross.

The presence in the fresco of both the icon of the Mother of God and the *Mandylion* could be explained as follows. In the first place, the Mandylion was moved to

¹³²Orthodox piety holds that the first icon of Christ appeared during His lifetime. This is the image called “the Holy Face” in the West; and “the icon not made by human hands” or Mandylion in the East. The story is mentioned in the fourth century by Eusebius of Cessarea and Evagrius, and quoted in the seventeenth century by Dionysius of Furna in his *Painter’s Manual*, p. 4 (43, 8). The legend describes how King Abgar V of Edessa (4 BC- 50 AD), afflicted with an incurable sickness, sent a portrait painter to paint a likeness of Christ. When the painter could not paint Him because of the brightness that shone from his countenance, Christ put a garment over His face, impressing on it an image of Him, and sent it to the king in order to satisfy his wish to be healed . See: Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009), p. 119; Mark Guscini, *The Image of Edessa* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), p. 212.

Constantinople in the tenth century,¹³³ and disappeared from Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204. Therefore, it was not present at the sieges of 626 and 1453. The reason for the inclusion of the Mandylion in the Moldavian fresco might have been the desire of the iconographers to remind believers about the miraculous origin of this icon, and the importance of icons in general. Now, the prototype of the icon of the Mother of God, used in the procession during the siege of 626 and in frescoes, is traditionally attributed to St. Luke the Evangelist.¹³⁴ The miracle-making icon of the Mother of God, which apparently saved the Byzantine Empire from collapse under the Avars' assault in 626, was for believers a connection between the visible world and the divine, and through it they were waiting to receive God's mercy. As a result of the procession with the relics and the intercession of the *Theotokos*, a storm came over the Turkish army that destroyed their navy and a rain of fire that destroyed their land troops. In the fresco, the besiegers (portrayed in detail) are not Avars but Ottoman Turks, who are identifiable by their sixteenth century Turkish costumes (from the period of Rares's reign) and by the cannons with which they are armed .

¹³³ "The History of the Image of Edessa: the Telling of a Story," in C. Mango and O. Pritsal eds., *Okeanos. Festschrift for I. Ševčenko, Harvard Ukrainian Studies* (1983), p. 80-94.

¹³⁴ According to Tradition, St. Luke sent not only his Gospel, but also the portrait of the Mother of God *Hodegetria* painted by himself, to Theophilus, a person to whom his Gospel is addressed (Luke 1:3). Steven Bigham, *Heroes of the Icon: People, Places, Events* (Torrance, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1998), p. 86.



Picture 7: Turkish army – detail - Moldovita

In the middle of both images, next to the archbishops is portrayed the emperor leading a multitude of men, whereas in the top of the fresco the empress is leading a female procession. Both Emperors Constantine XI Palaeologus, during the siege of 1454, and Heraclius, during the siege of 626, were widowers.¹³⁵ Vasile Grecu opines that the presence of the empress reflects the influence on the fresco of a Romanian folk literature about the

¹³⁵Constantine XI Palaeologus was widowed in 1453 (see: Nicol D, *The Immortal Emperor: The Life and Legend of Constantine Palaiologos, Last Emperor of the Romans* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 45-46.) The Emperor Heraclius (610-641) had been married twice. His first marriage to Fabia-Eudocia took place on the same day as his coronation, 5 October 610, but Eudocia died of epilepsy in 612. The date of Heraclius' second controversial marriage to his niece Martina is disputed. On the one hand, Theophanes the Confessor (d.818) places the marriage shortly after the death of Eudochia in 612/613 (see: Theophanes, *Chronographia*, transl. C. Mango & R. Scott, with G. Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284-813* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), AD 612/3). Yet, chronological mix-ups are common in Theophanes (see: Zuckerman C, "Heraclius in 625," in: *Revue des études byzantines* (t.60) (2002), p. 195-196.) On the other hand, St. Nikephoros, writer and Patriarch of Constantinople (d. 828), does not record Heraclius' second marriage until after the Avar attack (see: Whitby M, transl. *Chronicon Paschale* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), pp. 179-180.

Fall of Constantinople.¹³⁶ In the Romanian version, the empress had fled from the city through a secret gate, later recounting that the disaster that came over Constantinople was a consequence of the sinful life which the inhabitants lived.

According to the *Synaxarion*, the ratio between the enemies in the sieges was ten to one. The frescos illustrate the great multitude of Turks as a visible contrast with the small number of citizens behind the walls of Constantinople. Although there is a numerical difference between the two camps, not only did the city resist, but a courageous horseman also fought the enemy outside the city walls. This horseman, depicted at the bottom of the fresco, could symbolize Moldavia's continuing struggle implicitly that of Prince Rares, as a champion of Orthodox Christianity, against the Muslim Turks. At Humor, the horseman pierces the chest of the general of the Ottoman army, while in the Moldovita fresco, the latter is depicted on the ground. The defenders of Constantinople are all Moldavian soldiers. The role of Moldavians as defenders of Constantinople, and the depiction of the *Fall of Constantinople* as "victorious Constantinople" is the result of Prince Rares's desire to be the liberator of Constantinople.

In Rares' and the iconographers' imagination, not only was Constantinople defended by Moldavians, but the churches represented behind the city's walls also have the same architecture as Moldavian churches. In the fresco at Humor, there are churches covered with cupolas, a characteristic of the sixteenth-century Moldavian churches. One of them is, indeed, identical to the church of Probota monastery.¹³⁷ The inclusion of Probota behind the walls of Constantinople possibly was to show where the future Byzantine emperor would be anointed.

¹³⁶ Grecu is cited by Ciobanu in "Sursele Literare," p. 53 note 159.

¹³⁷ Paul Henry was the first to observe the Moldavian churches (Paul Henry, *op.cit.*, p. 240). Yet, the identification of one of the churches as the church of Probota Monastery is mine.

The many “prophecies” about the liberation of Constantinople had been assumed by Rares himself and for the fulfilment of his hope he requested prayers at the monasteries of Mount Athos in Greece. In 1533, Rares received a group of monks headed by Macarie, the abbot of Chilandar, a Serbian monastery on Mount Athos, because he wanted to become the patron of this monastery.¹³⁸ The Prince promised to his visitors that he would give a generous annual donation to the monastery in return for intercessory prayers to the Mother of God, to be sung by the abbot and his companions every Monday. Macarie also promised to the prince to celebrate for him a liturgy every Tuesday, with *kólliva*, a ritual food, and drinks for the monks.¹³⁹ The monks had to sing with loud voices the *polychronion* for Rares, as for a byzantine emperor, as long as he lived.¹⁴⁰ The document¹⁴¹ finishes with the prince’s promise to increase considerably his annual gift for the monastery if “God and the Holy Mother of God will have mercy and deliver them from the foreign people”, that is the Ottomans.¹⁴² He even prepared with Prohor, the archbishop of Ohrida, the ceremonial of his crowning as emperor.¹⁴³

In 1538, during the conspiracy against him, Rares fled to Transylvania abandoning the Moldavian throne. In 1541, he returned as Prince of Moldavia, with help from the Ottomans, which now was a vassal principality of the Ottoman sultan. There is a widespread view that the exterior frescoes of the monasteries, established during Rares’

¹³⁸ Petre S. Nasturel, *Le Mont Athos et les Roumains: Recherches sur leurs relations du milieu du xiv^e siècle à 1654* (Roma: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1986), p. 137.

¹³⁹ *Kólliva* (Greek κόλλυβα) is a ritual food obtained from boiled wheat, which is used liturgically in the Orthodox Church.

¹⁴⁰ The Polychronion is chanted during the Orthodox liturgy for the secular authorities, the church authorities, individuals on specific occasions.

¹⁴¹ Roller, *op.cit.*, pp. 356-357.

¹⁴² Nasturel, *op.cit.*, p. 138.

¹⁴³ Ciobanu, “Sursele Literare,” p. 80.

second reign, reflect the new political changes.¹⁴⁴ Thus, on the exterior walls of the monastic church of Arbore painted during Rares' second reign, is depicted the siege of 626 by the Persians and not the "victorious" Constantinople. There is no doubt about which siege is depicted, as can be understood by the costumes of the soldiers and an inscription above the battle scene, that specifies that is the battle of 626 which is shown. Thus, it seems that the prince had learnt the importance of 'political correctness,' even if he may have retained the vestiges of hope for a future liberation of Constantinople from the Ottomans. Paradoxically, on the same wall, there is the fresco of the Last Judgment. Herein, those who enter hell first are none other than the Ottoman Turks.

'Victorious' Constantinople disappeared from the Moldavian frescoes at the same time as Rares's hope to be the savior of Constantinople vanished in smoke, hence, too, his retreat from the political scene. According to contemporary witnesses, Rares was never a vassal to the Sultan, and he naively hoped for a miraculous liberation of both Moldavia and Constantinople.¹⁴⁵ Not only did Rares not see his dream fulfilled, but his elder son, Ilias, renounced his Christian faith and converted to Islam. Ilias's ascent to the Moldavian throne, his reign and his conversion to Islam, are described in the Chronicle of Grigore Ureche:

Both his nature and his face showed him as a kind, merciful and steady man, which would make one think he would be like his father. But he disappointed all expectations, because he looked like a tree in bloom, but he was inside a poisonous pond.... Among the numerous lawless acts Prince Ilias did, as he followed the advice of Satan, he left the reign of the country to his brother, Prince Stephen and his mother, in the year 7059 (1551). On May 1 he went to emperor Suleiman, where

¹⁴⁴ Dumitrescu, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

¹⁴⁵ Nicolae Iorga mentions that Ieronim Lasca the negotiator at the Ottoman Porte during Rares's second reign who said that the prince was very unhappy with the Ottoman domination of Moldavian lands. *Neamul Romanesc in Basarabia* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Fundatiei Culturale Romane, 1995), p. 174.

he received the religion of Mohammed, giving up Christ, thinking that he would acquire great honour from the emperor.¹⁴⁶

In 1550, before his conversion to Islam, Ilias, considering himself as the second founder of the Probota monastery alongside his father, asked the iconographers to modify the church votive painting and depict him as mature, rather than as a child, as well as crowned like his father.¹⁴⁷ The iconographers did as he wished, but after Ilias' conversion to Islam, to show their disapproval, they painted over his face with dark hues to emphasize his choice, in their view, amounted to selling his soul to the devil.



Picture 8: Petru Rares and his family – votive painting, Probota Monastery

Whereas the first interpretation of the *Fall of Constantinople* isolates the fresco from the rest of the iconic program, the second interpretation integrates this fresco within

¹⁴⁶Grigore Ureche, *Letopisetul*, p. 120.

¹⁴⁷Ovidiu Boldura, *Pictura Murala Din Nordul Moldovei, Modificari Estetice Si Restaurare (Mural Painting in the North of Moldavia, Aesthetic Modifications and Restauration)* (Suceava, Romania: Accent Print, 2007), p. 152.

the iconic programs to the left and the right of the representation of the *Fall of Constantinople*.

3.3. The Second Interpretation of the Fresco Representing the Fall of Constantinople

There are scholars who connect the fresco of the *Fall of Constantinople* at Humor with two others which border the scene, namely the *Burning Bush* on the left and the *Parable of the Prodigal Son* on the right.¹⁴⁸ The *Burning Bush* is an illustration of the passage from the book of Exodus (3:1-5) where God called Moses at the site of Mount Horeb from the midst of a bush “burning with fire” though it “was not consumed.”¹⁴⁹ The Orthodox Church interprets this event in two ways. According to *Hesychast* teaching, on seeing the flame, Moses was permitted to see God's uncreated energies, which is why the bush was not consumed.¹⁵⁰ The second interpretation is that the burning bush on Horeb has to be understood as a foreshadowing of the *Theotokos*. Here is the parallel: the *Theotokos* gave birth to the incarnate God while remaining a virgin and the bush burned without being consumed. On the Moldavian fresco, in the middle of the *Burning Bush*, one can see a small icon representing the Mother of God as ‘Oranta’ (i.e. Praying Virgin), also named the ‘Lady of the Sign’ (i.e. the Virgin of the Incarnation with Christ-Emmanuel on a medallion on her breast) or ‘Platytera’ (i.e. wider than the heavens).¹⁵¹ On the right side of

¹⁴⁸ Dumitrescu, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

¹⁴⁹ All the biblical quotations in the dissertation are from *The Orthodox Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 2008.

¹⁵⁰ Hesychasm, an Orthodox teaching defended by St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), maintains that, through spiritual discipline, silent contemplative prayer and God's grace, one can see the uncreated light of God, in the same way that the Apostles Peter, James and John had beheld Christ's glory on Mount Tabor. St. Gregory Palamas also teaches also that, though it remains impossible to know God in His essence (to know God in and of Himself), it is nonetheless possible to know Him in His energies.

¹⁵¹ In Orthodox iconography, the *Oranta* is the prototype, while the *Theotokos of the Sign* and the *Platytera* are variants of the *Oranta*. From the fresco, it is difficult to say which one of the three it is, due to the state of

the fresco depicting the *Fall of Constantinople* is the *Parable of the Prodigal Son* that illustrates the narration in Luke (15:11-32).

According to Sorin Dumitrescu, the fresco of the *Fall of Constantinople* was placed between these two frescoes in order to emphasize the fall of the Orthodox Christian center, which in itself was considered by Prince Rares as a disaster.¹⁵² Be that as it may, the disaster was a redemptive one, similar to the lesson taught by the parable of the prodigal son. Hence, the three frescoes have to be ‘read’ together from an eschatological perspective. Constantinople had the honor of being chosen as the Orthodox Christian center, like Moses was given the honor to contemplate the uncreated light of God. Yet, the inhabitants of Constantinople made themselves the ‘sons of sin,’ like the prodigal son who decided to leave his father’s house and to live a sinful life. This is why God decided to suspend the glory of Byzantium, and, hence the depiction on the fresco of the historical fall of Constantinople and the victory of the Ottoman Empire. However, there is hope and the fall of Constantinople is not lasting. One can see on the fresco, in the middle of the Burning Bush, the image of the Mother of God who gives birth to the Redeemer. If there is repentance, as in the parable of the prodigal son, Constantinople will be freed, because no sin can overcome God’s kindness and love for humankind, however great the sin might be.

It is significant that the frescoes depict again the life of the Moldavians. At the banquet offered by the father upon the return of his prodigal son, there are present the Moldavians who dance happily. They are dressed in folk costumes: shirts with ornaments, long tunics touching the knees and tied at the waist with girdles, and boots of different colors. This scene is a remarkable ‘localization’ of the eschatological banquet.

degradation (see: www.umanitoba.ca/colleges/st-andrews/essays/icons-of-the-theotokos.htm (authored by Dr. Vivian Olender).

¹⁵² Dumitrescu, *op.cit.*, p. 77.



Picture 9: The Burning Bush – Humor Monastery



Picture 10: The Parable of the Prodigal Son with Moldavian dancers – Humor Monastery

The second interpretation of the *Fall of Constantinople* emphasizes the importance of ‘reading’ the frescoes holistically, that is, taking into account the whole composition and its theological interest. This fresco was of interest to believers ever since the sixteenth

century. In the following section, I will describe a sixteenth century graffito referring to the *Fall of Constantinople*.

3.4. The Third Interpretation of the Fall of Constantinople: A Historical Graffito

Graffiti are the most frequent aggressions on Moldavian murals. There are numerous incisions encountered in all epochs as a consequence of the wish of people to leave traces of their visits to the monasteries. The majority of incisions are in the lower areas of the churches' murals, and frequently record the name and date of their visit to the monasteries. Vandalism on the murals is apparent by illustrations of animals, plants, and sometimes prayers of pilgrims. What is more, as a consequence of occult practices, parts of the frescoes were removed, in particular the eyes and ears of the saints that were used in magic.¹⁵³



Picture 11: Part of a fresco with incisions

¹⁵³ Boldura, *op.cit.*, p. 179.

Besides these acts of vandalism, there are sixteenth-century graffiti, probably made by monks, who were among the few literate sections of the population of those times. Over the years, some graffiti acquired a documentary value, for they can be correlated with various events of the period.¹⁵⁴ One example of this kind of graffiti was discovered in 1930 by André Grabar, on the fresco of the *Fall of Constantinople* at Moldovita monastery.¹⁵⁵ The inscription follows the upper side of the wall which surrounds the city of Constantinople, under the Moldavian soldier who is bent over a cannon.



Picture 12: Moldavita monastery – detail with the sixteenth century inscription

The graffiti of this anonymous author is very important because it gives a rare example of the way in which a sixteenth century Orthodox interpreted the fresco. The inscription deciphered by André Grabar reads as follows:

They figured the glorious victory of Constantinople on the scythe square, but why did they not represent the misfortune and the disaster they suffered because of the Saracen emir?¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁵⁵ Grabar, *op.cit.*, p. 74.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

The anonymous author observed that the fresco depicts the victory of Constantinople, and wondered why there was not depicted the disaster which Constantinople historically experienced, and which was on everybody's mind at that time. The author of the inscription was perhaps a literalist who wanted to see not a symbolical representation of the past, or of a future victory of Byzantium over the Ottoman Turks. He perhaps preferred to see the fresco depicting the historical truth. For the average sixteenth-century Greek person, the hope for a miraculous liberation of Constantinople was not a hopeless dream, as it seems to have been for the Moldavian author of the graffito.¹⁵⁷ We do not know if other ordinary Moldavians had the same opinion as the anonymous author of this graffito, but it is obvious that the ambition of Prince Rares to be the liberator of Constantinople was neither unknown, or rejected by a nameless viewer who was moved to express his experience of the reality of the time rather than the hopes and dreams of the fresco painters.

3.5. Conclusion

When depicting the *Fall of Constantinople* on the exterior walls of the churches of Humor and Moldovita monasteries, the iconographers tried to connect the iconographic art with the political ambitions of Prince Petru Rares to free Moldavia and Constantinople from foreign domination. The iconographers depicted this fresco in the context of the representation of the *Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God*, one of the most beloved prayers of Orthodox believers. They placed the *Akathistos Hymn* and the *Fall of Constantinople* on the right side of the entrance of the church, easily seen by those who entered it. The iconographers did not impose on the viewer their own interpretation but

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

allowed the fresco to be interpreted by each believer according to his/her own spiritual understanding.

Is the fresco representing the historical fall of Constantinople, or is it a depiction of the hope held by Prince Rares, who saw in himself the fulfillment of the ‘prophecies’ about the liberator of Constantinople? We cannot know if the iconographers spoke with Prince Rares about this fresco, but what we do know is that political propaganda was never more subtle than in the Humor and Moldovita depiction of the *Fall of Constantinople*. At Arbore monastery, and later at Sucevita monastery, the fresco of the *Fall of Constantinople* was replaced with the siege of 626. After Rares’ death, the illustration of the *Fall of Constantinople* disappeared from the Moldavian frescoes and was never depicted again on any other church in Moldavia.

The exterior frescoes are not the only frescoes that fascinate the viewer. Frescoes painted on the inside of the churches are also daring in their originality. One of the most eloquent examples of these is found in the church of Humor monastery. The next chapter includes a short history of the Humor monastery and of the architecture and interior frescoes of its church. This will help us to better understand the historical and architectural aspects of the monastery, and will also allow us to place it in the longer politico-artistic program of Prince Rares.

4. HUMOR MONASTERY: A SIXTEENTH CENTURY MOLDAVIAN CULTURAL CENTER

4.1. The History and Architecture of the Church of Humor Monastery

4.1.1. Historical Data

The first monastery at Humor was built before 1415, as it is mentioned in a document issued during the reign of Prince Alexandru cel Bun of Moldavia (1400-1432).¹⁵⁸ Two other documents were issued in 1428 and 1429 in which Prince Alexandru mentions his donation of three villages to the monastery.¹⁵⁹ We do not know whether the monastery belonged to Prince Alexandru, as was the case with the majority of monasteries at that time, or to the boyar Oana, who paid for its construction.¹⁶⁰ Neither do we know why the monastery was destroyed. Stefan Bals asserts that the monastery was destroyed at the beginning of the sixteenth century, during a battle fought by Prince Stephen the Great.¹⁶¹ Constantin Severin holds that the monastery was destroyed by an earthquake in 1528.¹⁶² The Archbishopric of Suceava and Radauti preserves a chronicle, written at the beginning of the nineteenth century, mentioning that the monastery was destroyed by the Tatars in 1527.¹⁶³ The stone ruins of the foundation of the monastery, measuring 24 by 10 meters, can still be seen today at a short distance away from the present Humor monastery.

The work for the new monastery began during the first reign of Prince Rares (in 1530). Its church was dedicated to the *Dormition of the Mother of God* (one of the major feasts of the Orthodox Church).

¹⁵⁸ Dragut, *Humor*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁹ Roller, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

¹⁶⁰ Dragut, *Humor*, p. 8.

¹⁶¹ Stefan Bals, *Manastirea Humor* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Meridiane, 1965), p. 6.

¹⁶² Constantin Severin, *Imperiul Sacru: Manastiri Si Biserici Din Nordul Moldovei* (Suceava, Romania: Editura Paralela 45, 2003), p. 40.

¹⁶³ Dragos Corlăteanu, *Manastirea Humorului* (Suceava, Romania: Cuvantul Nostru, 2000), p. 36.



Picture 13: The church of Humor Monastery

The inscription carved in stone on the southern exterior wall of the church provides information about its construction. The church construction was ordered by Prince Rares, but was paid for by Toader Buduiog, the prince's Great Chancellor, and his wife.



Picture 14: The inscription carved in stone at the church of Humor monastery

The inscription written in Slavonic reads:

With God's will and with the Son's help and with the Holy Ghost's work, by order of the pious Ruler Petru Voda, son of Ruler Stephen the Old, this monastery was erected in the name of the Precious Dormition of the Most Pure and most Blessed

Mother of God and Ever Virgin Mary at the expense of and with the efforts of God's servant Toader, Great Chancellor, and of his wife, Anastasia, in 7038 (1530), the month of August and when father superior was Paisie.¹⁶⁴

Prince Rares had written nice words about his faithful Chancellor in a series of documents, dated between 1528 and 1534. The following is an excerpt from one of them:

Our true faithful boyar, pan Toader, Chancellor of my lamented holy father, Stephen Voyevod, and of my brother, Bogdan Voyevod, and of my nephew, Stephen Voyevod, faithfully served them and now he faithfully serves me.¹⁶⁵

One also finds that Toader was sent to Buda in 1525 by Prince Stefanita as messenger to Louis II, King of Hungary and Bohemia (1516-1526). In 1531, he was the commander of Rares' army at Obertyn in the conflict with the Polish army, and in 1534, he was sent by Rares to Transylvania on a diplomatic mission.¹⁶⁶ Thus, one can infer that Toader Buduiog was one of the most respected Moldavian dignitaries, involved not only in politics but also in Moldavian cultural life.

The Humor Monastery, the construction for which Toader Buduiog payed, was in Rares' good grace, because there are many documents mentioning that he endowed it with lands, beehives, exemptions from taxes, etc.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, there are good reasons to assume that Rares initially chose Humor church to be his family necropolis, although later he decided to change it to the church of Probota monastery. This was done on the advice of his cousin, Grigorie Rosca, who was at that time the abbot of Probota and later the Metropolitan of Moldavia.¹⁶⁸ This assumption is not based only on the generous gifts and

¹⁶⁴The content of the inscription in Romanian and in English is exhibited inside the church of Humor monastery.

¹⁶⁵Bals, *op.cit.*, p. 9 (ET mine).

¹⁶⁶For more information on chancellor Teodor's missions see: Bals, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁶⁷Roller, *op.cit.*, pp. 334-335 and 445.

¹⁶⁸Pacurariu, *op.cit.*, p. 471.

donations which he made to the monastery; it is also related to the votive painting of the church's nave. On the right side of the nave's wall, there is a votive painting of Rares' family in which he offers the church to Christ. In Byzantine and Moldavian church painting, that area of the church wall was traditionally reserved for the votive portrait of the founder, who would have chosen that particular church as his family necropolis.

In the votive painting, Prince Rares is depicted alongside one of his sons, Stephen (illustrated at a smaller scale), and his wife Elena. Rares is portrayed wearing a princely crown and a ceremonial brocade cloak all embroidered with golden thread. His round face is framed by his curly light-hair. He has a long straight nose, and above his thick lips appears a thin moustache. Rares' countenance has all the qualities of authenticity, being not only a conventional effigy, as often happened in medieval pictures, but a genuine portrait. The princess impresses the viewer with her beautiful features and the elegance of her attitude. The oval shape of her face is made evident by its fine features, by her Roman nose, and by the slight smile on her lips. She is wearing a red dress and, on top of it, she has a golden silk cloak. She has a veil on her head, hemstitched with gold, and above the veil is a princely crown. From under the veil, on the lateral sides, appear three chains of pearls hanging on golden threads. Vasile Dragut considers the representation of Princess Elena as one of the most beautiful portraits ever produced in Moldavia.¹⁶⁹ In the fresco, next to Princess Elena, is Prince Rares offering a miniature replica of the Humor monastic church to Christ by the intercession of the Mother of God, to whom the church is dedicated. The Mother of God has in her hand an open parchment on which is written a prayer. Christ, who is seated on a throne, has a closed Gospel in his left hand and, is blessing Prince Rares with his right hand.

¹⁶⁹ Dragut, *Humor*, p. 18.



Picture 15: Votive painting - Prince Rares' family

Toader Buduiog and his wife Anastasia also have their votive paintings in the church, but it is placed in *gropnita* where they were buried and not on the nave's wall where the founders of the church are usually depicted. Toader is portrayed as offering a miniature replica of the church to Christ through the intercession of the Mother of God, whereas his wife, Anastasia, is praying to the Mother of God who opens her right hand towards Anastasia, a gesture symbolizing the reception of the latter's prayers. These two votive paintings are important, especially for details regarding the clothing styles of sixteenth century Moldavia.



Picture 16: Toader and Anastasia Buduiog, votive paintings

The Humor monastery was troubled by assaults over the two centuries following its construction. In 1641, to protect the monastery, Vasile Lupu, the ruler of Moldavia at that time, fortified it with a defense tower and surrounded it with defensive walls. On the southern wall of the tower, there is this inscription:

This tower was erected and adorned by the pious and Christ-loving Prince Vasile Voyevod, with God's mercy, ruler and Prince of the whole land, in the year 7149 (1641).

The tower is made from asymmetrical stones and has an oak balcony on the top floor. The western and northern walls each have an abutment. The building comprises a ground floor and three storeys, the covering system being made of cradle vaults, and the doors and windows have small openings with gothic profiles.



Picture 17: Homor's defense tower

Even if the monastery was reinforced, it did not withstand enemy attacks. One such attack took place in 1653, when the monastic complex was plundered and set on fire during a Cossack attack.¹⁷⁰ Many manuscripts that were written in the monastery or that were received as gifts, as well as embroideries, icons and liturgical vessels, were destroyed. However, the most difficult time for the monastery came in 1774, when Moldavia was occupied by Austrians and when many monasteries were closed. In that year, the Humor monastic church was transformed into a parish church, and, ten years later, in 1784, it was closed.¹⁷¹ It was only in 1991 that the monastery was reopened, and, since then, it has been a small convent for nuns. Out of the old monastic complex, there has remained only the church from Rares' reign and the tower from the time of Lupu.

¹⁷⁰ Bals, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁷¹ Bals, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

4.1.2. The Scriptorium of Humor Monastery

Decades after the fall of Constantinople, Byzantine art was being revived in Moldavian monasteries and in churches built by Stephen the Great and his son Petru Rares. This revival is reflected in wall frescoes, in workshops devoted to religious embroidery, and in manuscripts copied and illuminated with remarkable care.¹⁷² This Byzantine renaissance, therefore, was marked by the new Moldavian sensibility that gave it a strong original character.

Prince Stephen the Great and, later, his son, Prince Petru Rares, encouraged the chronicling of the battles and other events of their country's history. At the same time, the scribes in the most important monasteries were ceaselessly producing manuscripts for use in church services or pious reading. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, there were active literary centers at various monasteries, the most important of which was at Putna. This last center became the equivalent of an Academy of Arts and Letters thanks to the favor of Prince Stephen the Great.¹⁷³ The literary heritage achieved in this period is very valuable. In 1473, the hieromonk Nicodim copied, in the scriptorium of Putna monastery, the most beautiful manuscript written during the reign of Stephan the Great. This was the *Book of the Four Gospels*, which was destined for the old church of the Humor monastery.¹⁷⁴

In the epilogue of the book, one reads the following:

I, Stephan Voyevod, by God's mercy, Prince of the country of Moldavia, commissioned this Book of the Gospels and it was written by the hand of the hieromonk Nicodim and I have given it as a gift to the Humor monastery, for the

¹⁷² Emil Turdeanu and E. D. Tappe, "Centres of Literary Activity in Moldavia, 1504-1552," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 34 (1955), p. 99.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁷⁴ Emil Trudeanu, *Études de littérature roumaine et d'écrits slaves et grecs des Principautés Romaines* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), p. 128.

remembrance of my soul and of my parents' and of my children's. The book was written at the time of abbot Gherontie and was finished on June 17th, in the year 6981 (1473).¹⁷⁵

The manuscript is written on 278 parchment sheets in Slavonic and had as its model another famous *Gospel Book* written by Gavril Uric in 1429 also at Neamt monastery and preserved today at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. This book was written in both Slavonic and Greek.¹⁷⁶

The *Book of the Four Gospels*, copied for Humor Monastery, is arranged in sequence like the New Testament, that is: Sts. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each Gospel is preceded by a miniature in full-page illumination representing the Evangelists sitting and writing their respective Gospel.



Picture 18: The Evangelists - Miniatures of the *Book of the Gospels* from Humor

The book also contains the oldest iconographic portrait of Prince Stephen the Great, who is depicted kneeling in front of the Mother of God *Hodegetria*, offering him the *Book of the Four Gospels*. The image on the bottom right side is a colorless part, since the hieromonk Nicodim did not finish the miniature. While we will never know what he intended to have in that area, it is possible that the place next to the prince was reserved for

¹⁷⁵ I took the content of the epilog from Bals' book, *Humor*, p. 27 (ET mine).

¹⁷⁶ Emil Turdeanu, "The Oldest Illuminated Moldavian Ms.," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 29 (1951), p. 456.

his family, as in the votive paintings, or to Humor's church to which the *Book of the Four Gospels* was addressed. The gilded silver covers of the Book were made at the Humor Monastery in 1487. The front cover shows an inscription with the following content: "I, Stephen Voyevod, with God's mercy, prince of Moldavia country, son of Bogdan Voyevod, overlay this Gospel with metal at Humor monastery, in the year 6995 (1487), November 20th." ¹⁷⁷ The bas-relief on the front cover illustrates the *Descent of Christ into Hades*, the traditional Orthodox depiction for the feast of the Resurrection. On the back cover is the *Dormition of the Mother of God*, the feast to which the later church of Humor monastery (erected during Rares' reign) was dedicated. The *Book of the Four Gospels* from Humor is one of the most beautiful and elegant manuscript Moldavia ever produced. ¹⁷⁸

In 1971, the manuscript was taken into custody at the National Museum of History, where it is kept at present, whereas at the Museum of Putna Monastery there are exhibited miniature facsimiles of Stephen's portrait.



Picture 19: The portrait of Prince Stephen the Great (detail)

¹⁷⁷ I took the content of the inscription from Bals' book, *Humor*, p. 27 (ET mine).

¹⁷⁸ Turdeanu and Tappe, "Centers of Literary Activity in Moldavia," pp. 99-122.

During the Ottoman campaign of 1538, Paisie, the then abbot of the Humor monastery, afraid that the Ottomans would destroy this book, sent it to Ciceu. Prince Rares found it during his exile, and took it with him to Constantinople and then returned it to the Humor monastery when he became prince of Moldavia for the second time. This historical fact is recorded on one of the book's pages.¹⁷⁹ Yet, there is another historical event recorded on the pages of this book:

During the year 7162 (1653) Timus Hmelnitki came with the Cossacks here in our Moldavian country, and the wife of Voyevod Vasile was held hostage in the citadel of Suceava, until Timus Hmelnitki, Prince Vasile's son-in-law, came with his army to free her. At that time, they plundered and set fire to churches and monasteries and plundered all the beautiful treasures Humor monastery had. Moreover, there was nothing left to the holy monasteries. The Cossacks also stole the Book of the Four Gospels. However, with God's mercy this holy book reached the great general, Kemeny Ianas, from whom I, Voyevod Gheorghe Stefan, by God's mercy prince of Moldavia, bought it back. Later I returned the book to the holy monastery of Humor, for my remembrance and to receive help when I need forgiveness of my sins. I brought it back the year of 7105 (1656), the month of September 25th.¹⁸⁰

The *Book of the Four Gospels* and other manuscripts commissioned by princes were very beautiful, whereas those commanded by boyars or prelates, were not of the same quality. For example, the liturgical book for the months of January and February, received in 1492 by the old church of Humor monastery, is a manuscript without much artistic value. This book was donated to the monastery by Ioan Tautul, chancellor and private counselor of Prince Stephan.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Ion Bogdan, "Evangeliiile De La Humor Si Voronet Din 1473 Si 1550 (The Gospels from Humor and Voronet 1473 and 1550)," *Analele Academiei Romane* 29 (1907), p. 649.

¹⁸⁰ I took the content of the inscription from Nicolae Grigoras and Ioan Caprosu, *Biserici si manastiri vechi din Moldova, pana la mijlocul secolului al xvi-lea* (Bucharest, Romania: Meridiane, 1968), pp. 42-43 (ET mine).

¹⁸¹ Emil Turdeanu, *Études de littérature roumaine et d'écrits slaves et grecs des principautés Romaines* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), p. 135.

Although in 1473 Stephen the Great gave the *Book of Four Gospels* to the monastery, there is no evidence for the existence of a cultural center at Humor monastery before the coronation of Prince Petru Rares in 1527. Thanks to the prince's Chancellor, Toader Buduiog, Humor monastery developed an important literary activity lasting until 1570.¹⁸² In 1530, hieromonk Teodosie copied for the Humor monastic church a new *Book of the Four Gospels*. This book is preserved in the Muscovite Museum of History.¹⁸³ The manuscript has 383 folios, and on the last one, there is the signature of Teodosie.

In 1535, a fine *Gospel* was produced at the Humor monastery and is now preserved at the Leningrad Public Library.¹⁸⁴ Emil Turdeanu described the manuscript and gave information on its history.¹⁸⁵ He presented it as a beautiful manuscript illustrated with icons of the Evangelists Matthew and John, who have typical Moldavian countenances. The book also has beautiful frontispieces, vignettes and initials painted on with gold and various colors. This book was produced in the scriptorium at Humor by the order of Chancellor Toader who then donated it to the Dobrovat monastery. In the same scriptorium, in June 1540, the hieromonk Paisie made a copy of the Acts of the Apostles.¹⁸⁶ He dedicated the book to the memory of Chancellor Toader (died January 1539), to his successive wives, Anastasia and Martha, and to the chancellor's parents, Joachim and Ana. The manuscript is on parchment, and has 236 folios. In the center of the first folio is depicted the Mother of God, and in each corner are portrayed the four Evangelists. This manuscript is preserved at the Ukrainian library of Lviv University.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Turdeanu and Tappe, "Centers of Literary Activity in Moldavia," p. 109.

¹⁸³ Turdeanu, *Études de littérature roumaine et d'écrits slaves et grecs des principautés Romaines*, p. 193.

¹⁸⁴ Turdeanu and Tappe, "Centers of Literary Activity in Moldavia," p. 109.

¹⁸⁵ Turdeanu, *Études de littérature roumaine et d'écrits slaves et grecs des principautés Romaines*, p. 195.

¹⁸⁶ Turdeanu and Tappe, "Centers of Literary Activity in Moldavia," p. 109.

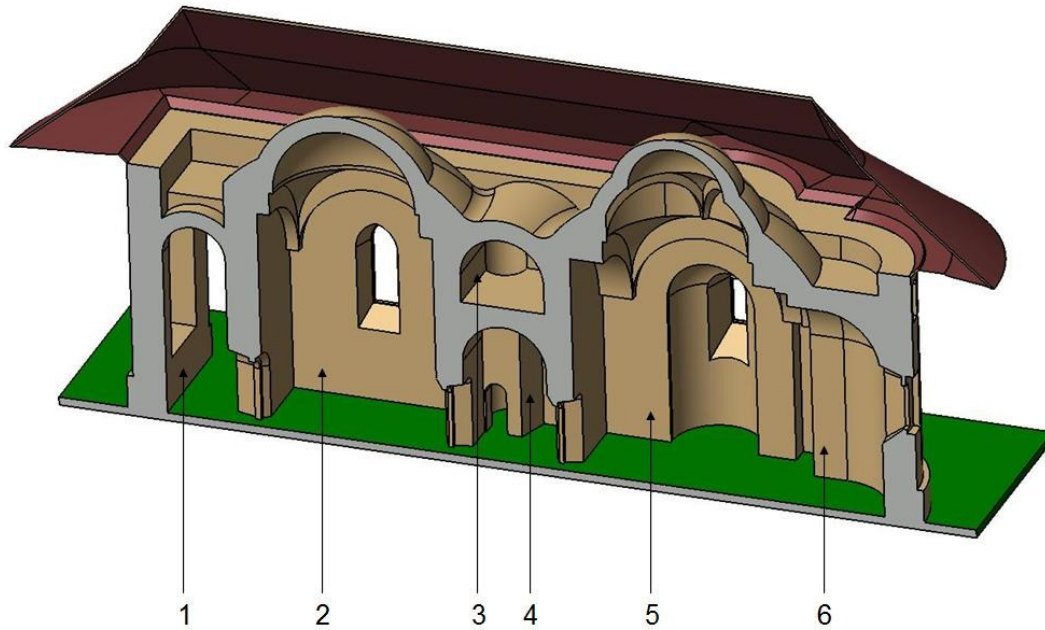
¹⁸⁷ Turdeanu, *Études de littérature roumaine et d'écrits slaves et grecs des principautés Romaines*, p. 195.

Without question, there were many other manuscripts. The monks of Humor monastery were producing many manuscripts intended for use in church services, or pious reading. Some of them were sold, others donated as gifts to Moldavian or foreign monasteries, and still others were stolen, lost, or destroyed during the long history of the monastery.

4.1.3. The Architecture of the Church of Humor Monastery¹⁸⁸

The Humor monastic church impresses the viewer with the harmony of its proportions. Having as its models the plans of Putna and Neamt churches, which were constructed during the reign of Stephen the Great, the church of Humor Monastery involved many innovations. The plan of the church is composed of three-apses, with a *gropnita* interposed between the nave and narthex. Above the *gropnita*, there is a secret room where the monastery's treasures were stored.

¹⁸⁸ I have analyzed the church's architecture and structure details together with Eng. Valentin Bara, in 2008. (I have a BAC in civil engineering). We verified our observations with the following scholarly works: Bals, *op.cit.*, pp. 12-18; Dragut, *Humor*, pp. 9-15; Vasile Dragut and Corina Nicolescu, *Monumente Istorice Bisericessti Din Mitropolia Moldovei Si Sucevei* (Iasi, Romania: Mitropoliei Moldovei si Sucevei, 1974), pp. 165-172. Valentin Bara drew all the plans and sections of the church included in this dissertation, using dedicated software.

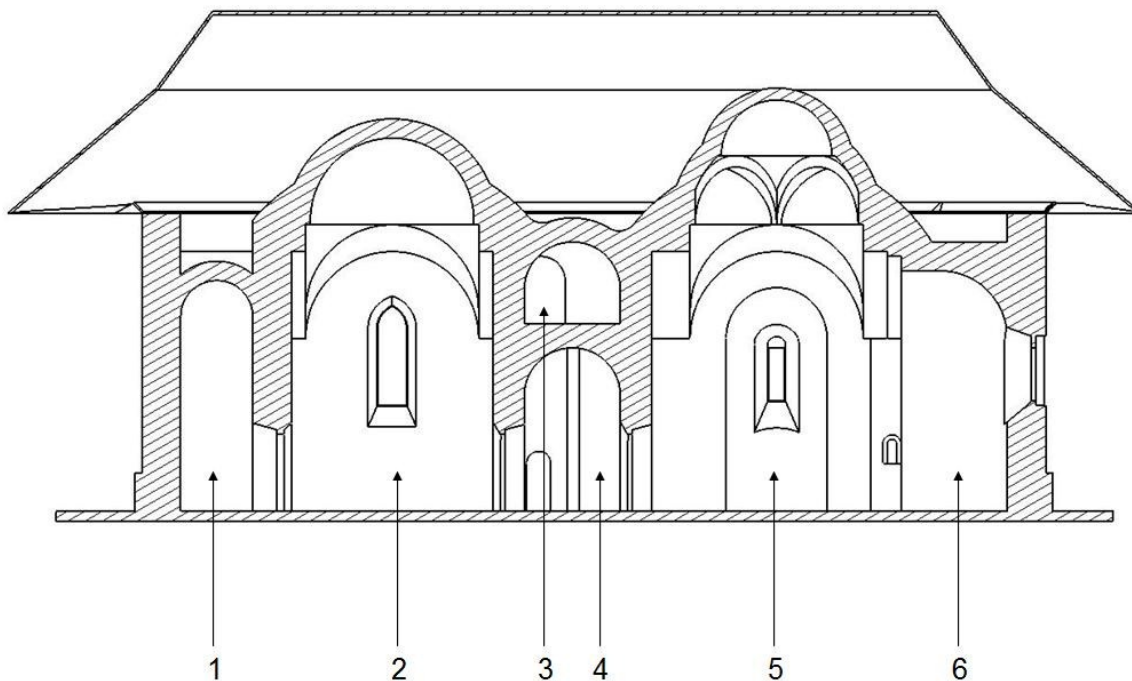


Picture 20: The Church of Humor Monastery - Isometric Cross View

1 – the open porch
2 – the narthex

3 – the secret room
4 – the *gropnita*

5 – the nave
6 – the altar



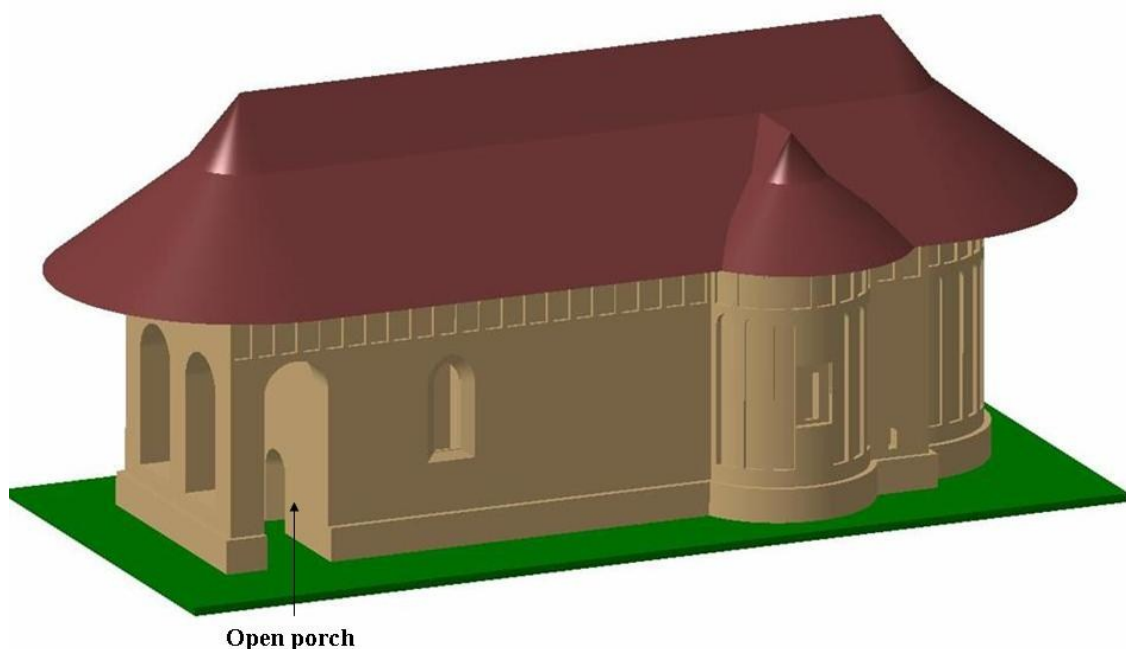
Picture 21: The Church of Humor Monastery - Section View

1 – the open porch
2 – the narthex

3 – the secret room
4 – the *gropnita*

5 – the nave
6 – the altar

The church does not have a tower above the nave, which is unusual not only for Moldavian churches, but also for Orthodox Church architecture in general. Another innovation in church architecture, alongside the secret room and the absence of the tower, is the open arcaded porch.



Picture 22: Church of Humor Monastery Isometric View

The introduction of the open porch in Moldavian architecture may be the result of a local innovation, from the closed porch with small windows at Neamt, to that with large windows at Saint George church in Suceava, then to the porch with belfry at Patrauti, and finally to the entirely open porch at Humor.¹⁸⁹ Vasile Dragut considers that the open porch at Humor is the result of the influence from Renaissance architecture.¹⁹⁰ Whatever the

¹⁸⁹ Bals, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁹⁰ Dragut, *Humor*, p. 10.

reason for the innovation, the open porch is not characteristic to Moldavian architecture, being used only twice - at Humor and Moldovita monastic churches.¹⁹¹

There are also Gothic influences in Humor's church architecture that can be seen on the pedestal marked with a gothic profile in its superior part and on the rectangular frames of the windows. Sorin Dumitrescu explains sixteenth-century Moldavian architecture as a derivation from the Byzantine style, to which were added elements from Catholic art, resulting in the unique Moldavian version of a Gothic-Byzantine style.¹⁹² However, André Grabar has a different opinion: he thinks that Moldavian architecture and iconography have their roots in the art of the Balkans, and especially Serbia.¹⁹³ The Serbian influence might be due to the presence of master masons hired by Prince Rares who were not exclusively Moldavians, but also Serbians and Saxons.¹⁹⁴ Rares' second wife, Princess Elena Branković (1502–1552, married Rares in 1530), was the daughter of the Serbian despotic Jovan Branković.¹⁹⁵ Consequently, she may have influenced her husband's choice of master masons. Dragut holds that the princess' influence on art is not limited to Humor monastery. Her influence is obvious in the churches of Suceava and Botosani, built with her financial support after the death of her husband.¹⁹⁶

The exterior walls of the Humor monastic church are entirely covered with frescos. Hence, in order to protect the frescoes from inclement weather, the builders covered the edifice with a clapboard roof with large eaves. From the open porch, one enters

¹⁹¹ Bals, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁹² Dumitrescu, *op.cit.*, pp. 46-47.

¹⁹³ André Grabar, "L'origine Des Façades Peintes Des Églises Moldaves," in *Mélanges Offerts À M. Nicholas Iorga par ses amis de France et des pays de langue française* (Paris: J. Gamber, 1933), p. 376.

¹⁹⁴ Pacurariu, *op.cit.*, p. 587.

¹⁹⁵ Stefan Gorovei, "Familia Lui Petru Rares," in *Petru Rares*, edited by Leon Simansky (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1978), p. 267.

¹⁹⁶ Dragut, *Humor*, p. 18.

into the narthex, which is square shaped and framed with arches in their upper part, and which has its dome supported on arches as well.

The next rooms, the *gropnita* and the nave, are separated by breakthrough walls. The *gropnita* is vaulted in a semi-cylinder, and the nave, which is rectangular, has its vault supported by a system of arches slanting on the large arches of the church.¹⁹⁷ On the right side wall of the *gropnita*, there is a niche with the grave of Toader Buduiog. On the gravestone is inscribed the following:

This stone was adorned during his life and for him, Boyar Toader, the great chancellor, when Prince of Moldavia was Petru Voyevod. He himself prepared his grave and he passed into eternity in the year 7047 (1539), in the month of January 1st.

On the left side is another niche with the grave of Toader's wife, Anastasia. It is interesting to mention that Anastasia died three years before the church was built. She must have been reinterred, which shows how important the church was for the chancellor. On Anastasia's gravestone, this is written:

This grave was adorned by Boyar Toader, Great Chancellor, for his wife Anastasia who passed into eternity in the year 7035 (1527), in the month of September 29th.

In the southwestern corner of the room, there is a circular staircase carved in stone, half inserted into the thickness of the wall, leading to the secret room, a place where icons and books were hidden during assaults. From the *gropnita* one enters into the nave, the largest and darkest room, as there are only two small windows for light to enter.

¹⁹⁷ Dragut and Nicolescu, *op.cit.*, p. 169.

The eastern part of the church, which is circular, is reserved for the altar. In the thickness of the northern and southern altar's walls, there are two niches: the *diaconicum* and the *anaphorium*.¹⁹⁸

4.1.4. The Architecture of the Church and the Golden Ratio

Scholarly works on Moldavian monasteries do not give much information on the architecture of the church at Humor. However, there are a few books containing rudimentary ground plans.¹⁹⁹

All the plans and sections of the church included in this dissertation have been drawn using the church's ground plans just mentioned and the data collected on site. In working on the church plans, I recognized that the architects of the church knew and utilized the golden ratio.

The golden ratio is the ratio between the dimensions of a piece of art or architecture. Its value is: $\varphi=1.6180339887\dots$ ²⁰⁰ The golden ratio has fascinated intellectuals from all fields, including mathematicians, biologists, artists, musicians, historians, architects, etc., and is considered to be the ratio of perfection. It is observed in nature, and has been used by artists in their works for centuries. To give one example, the

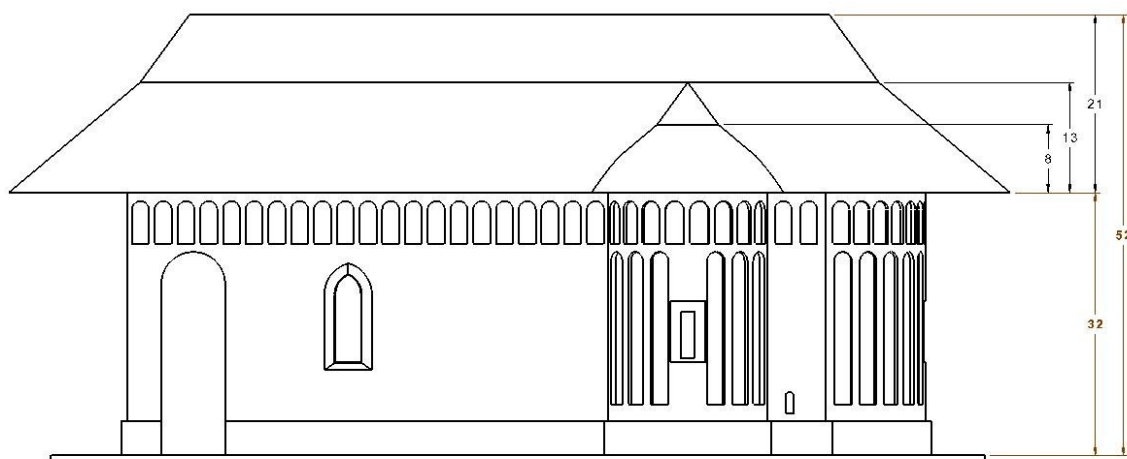
¹⁹⁸ The *diaconicum* is a small annex where were kept sacred vessels, books and liturgical dress. The *anaphorium* is a small annex where the holy gifts (the bread and wine) are prepared for the liturgy.

¹⁹⁹ Anca Vasiliu, *Monastères de Moldavie XIV^e - XVI^e, les architectures de l'image*, p. 30; Alan Ogden, *Revelation of Byzantium. The Monasteries and Painted Churches of Northern Moldavia* (Iasi-Oxford-Palm Beach-Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 2002), p. 142.

²⁰⁰ For the details on the calculation of golden ratio see: Livio Mario, *The Golden Ratio: The Story of Phi, the World's Most Astonishing Number* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002).

proportions of the Acropolis, the greatest and finest sanctuary of ancient Athens (it includes the Parthenon), approximate the golden ratio.²⁰¹

At Humor, the proportion between the principal measurements of the church comes close to the golden ratio.²⁰²



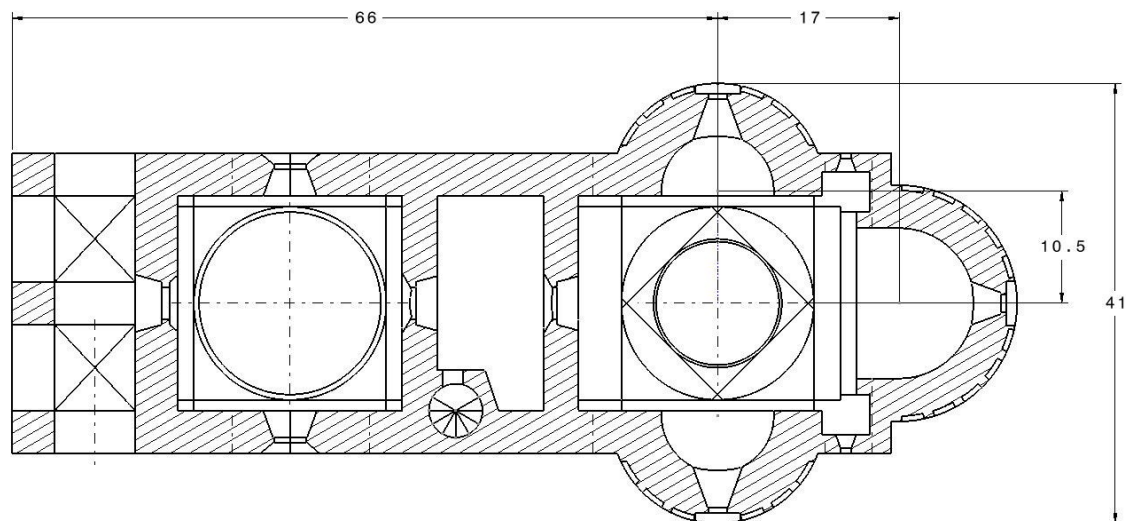
Picture 23: The Measurement of the Church of Humor Monastery

For example, the proportion between the total height of the church and the height of the roofless church is 1,625. In addition, the proportion between the length from the porch to the central dome of the church, and the width of the church, is 1,609.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Audrey M. van Mersbergen, "Rhetorical Prototypes in Architecture: Measuring the Acropolis with a Philosophical Polemic," *Communication Quarterly* 46 (1998), pp. 194-213.

²⁰² All the measurements of the drawings are in *palma*, a measurement used by Moldavians in the sixteenth century. See: the *Encyclopædia Britannica* online, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1286365/measurement-system>, and the *Romanian Dictionary* online, <http://dexonline.ro/search.php?cuv=palma> (accessed on 22 Oct. 2009). Even today in Moldavia's countryside, the villagers use *palma* as measure.

²⁰³ I limited this subject to only two examples because the subject of this dissertation is not the architecture of the church. Anyhow, there are many other proportions between the church measurements which approximate the golden ratio.



Picture 24: The Measurement of the Church of Humor Monastery

According to the measurements, one can propose two hypotheses. On the one hand, the architects seem to have been aware of the golden ratio and to have consciously employed it in the building of the church at Humor Monastery. On the other hand, it is possible that the architects used their own sense of good proportion, and this led to some ratios that accidentally come close to the golden ratio. Be that as it may, the proportions of the church give the striking impression of total harmony to the careful observer. The admirable employment of proportion in architectural design, together with the beauty of the frescoes, makes the church of Humor Monastery a unique UNESCO monument.

4.2. The Interior and Exterior Frescoes of the Church of Humor Monastery

4.2.1. Byzantine Frescoes

Before exploring the exterior and interior frescoes of the church, it is important to note certain aspects of Byzantine art. Until the end of the nineteenth century, Byzantine art

included the art of the Christian East: Constantinople, the Mediterranean regions, Egypt and North Africa, Asia Minor, Syria, Armenia, Georgia, Russia, the Balkans, and the Romanian Principalities of Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania.²⁰⁴ Its development took place between the founding of Constantinople in the fourth century and the sixteenth century. As for the Balkans (including the Romanian Principalities), the development continued until the eighteenth century.²⁰⁵ Following Napoléon Didron, some scholars characterize the thinking and the Byzantine esthetic as uniform, without further development or originality.²⁰⁶ Later research rejects definitively the theory of uniformity and immobility.²⁰⁷ It is true that for icons and frescoes there are models and painting manuals to be followed, but painting them is not servile copying. An expert eye can easily see the artistic imprint of the iconographer. True, the iconographer may use the older models of countenances of saints in order for the faithful to recognize them easily, thus risking rigidity and conformity. Consequently, the quality of an icon or fresco rests very much on the iconographer's talent.

For an iconographer, painting icons or frescoes means painting sacred images that are indispensable to the spirituality of the Orthodox Church. Iconography is a sacred art, not a mere decorative skill. It is, thus, a visual support for worship. The visual impact of an icon or fresco must be to engage a worshipper in a way similar to an encounter with another person. As Nikos Kokosalakis writes, the relationship of the worshipper to the icon

²⁰⁴ I.D. Stefanescu, *Iconografia artei bizantine si a picturii feudale Romanesti* (Bucharest, Romania: Meridiane, 1973), p. 19.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Adolphe Napoléon Didron, "Introduction," in *Manuel d'iconographie chrétienne, grecque et latine* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1845).

²⁰⁷ Stefanescu, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

or fresco is one of communicating or engaging the heart and the mind simultaneously.²⁰⁸ Therefore, when Orthodox believers pray before icons, whether privately at home or in church services, they do indeed hold true, silent or whispered conversations with the saints depicted in them.

In Byzantine art, that which the narrative declares in writing is the same as that which the icon or fresco does in color. Liz James remarks that ‘writing’ in Greek is *γραφός* and that ‘painting’ is *ζωγραφός*, the addition being *ζωή*, which means ‘life.’²⁰⁹ Color puts life into the painting by making the image real, recognizable and, most importantly, true. James mentions that the Church Fathers regarded sight as the most important of all the senses, a view they inherited from classical philosophy.²¹⁰ She gives several examples: St. John Chrysostom saw the eyes as the most necessary of all our members, and he pointed out that if we want to convince someone, we say ‘I have seen it with my own eyes’, not ‘I know by hearsay’.²¹¹ Patriarch Nikephoros said that “we all know that sight is the most honored and necessary of the senses,” emphasizing that visual representation was clearer than oral communication, since speech could be distorted and debated, but the impressions of pictorial representations were trustworthy.²¹² St. John of Damascus said: “the first sense is sight,” and “sight is primarily the perception of the color.”²¹³ Thus, for Orthodoxy, there is, in Byzantine art, a significant contribution of learning and knowledge of faith.

²⁰⁸ Nikos Kokosalakis, “Icons and Non-Verbal Religion in the Orthodox Tradition,” *Social Compass* 42 (1995), p. 437.

²⁰⁹ Liz James, “Color and Meaning in Byzantium,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003), p. 232.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 224-225.

²¹¹ James refers here to Chrysostom’s *Homily on John* 26. James. “Color and Meaning in Byzantium,” 228; See also: B. Leyerle. “John Chrysostom on the Gaze,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993), pp. 159-174.

²¹² James cites Nikephorus in her article. *Apologeticus* 63, PG 100:749-752. See also: J. Travis, *In Defense of the Faith. The Theology of Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople* (Brookline: Hellenic College Press, 1984), p. 48.

²¹³ James cites in her article: John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* 2.18. PG 94: 933D-936A.

Knowledge is the ascent “with the spiritual eyes to the prototype” or, to use Giakalis’s words, “we ascend through sensible images, as far as possible, to divine contemplation.”²¹⁴

Peter Brown stresses that, for Orthodox believers, the icon was “a hole in the dyke separating the visible world from the divine, and through this hole there oozed precious dribblets from the great sea of God’s mercy.”²¹⁵ Orthodox Christian believers get from the holy images what they never expected to get from any other image: “they get the miracle of healing and the greater miracle of a flood of tears of repentance for their sins.”²¹⁶

Scripture and Tradition are both depicted on the walls of Orthodox churches for believers to ‘read’ and study the images at their own level of understanding. For Orthodox believers, matter also provides a channel for communication with God. Thus, in worship, the Orthodox faithful believes that he can ascend, as far as possible, through the icon or fresco to divine contemplation while divine grace descends through the icon or fresco to them. These images are representations of the canonical Gospels or apocryphal writings, valued by the Tradition, and are expressions of the Orthodox faith. Therefore, icons and frescoes reveal to believers a transformed universe and, “alongside the Eucharist and relics of the saints, [they] can raise those who are worthy, the uneducated or the learned, to intimacy with God.”²¹⁷

By means of Byzantine art, each nation expressed its soul and the spirit of the period in which the icons were made. Moldavia became acquainted with the Byzantine style and fell under its spell after the fall of Constantinople (1453).²¹⁸ Moreover,

²¹⁴ Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine* (Leiden - New York - Koln: Brill, 1994), pp. 57-58.

²¹⁵ Peter Brown, “A Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy,” *The English Historical Review* (1973), p. 7.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²¹⁷ Giakalis, *op.cit.*, p. 137.

²¹⁸ UNESCO and André Grabar, *Rumania: Painted Churches of Moldavia* (UNESCO World Art Series 19, Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1962), p. 5.

Moldavian art in general and, implicitly, the Humor monastic church in particular, is the posthumous ‘child’ of Byzantine art, or “Byzantium after Byzantium”, as Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga would say.²¹⁹

The Moldavian iconographers, by drawing their inspiration from Byzantine art, created at the church of Humor Monastery the frescoes, the icons and the iconostasis which one can still admire today.

4.2.2. The Painters of the Church of Humor Monastery

According to the Church historian Mircea Pacurariu, the iconographers of the Humor monastic church were Moldavians who were very conversant with the iconographic School of Mount Athos.²²⁰ This historian believes that the fresco of the Last Judgment in the church of Humor monastery, one of the most remarkable frescoes, was inspired by the Athonite frescoes having the same theme. Dragut, too, holds that the Athonite School of iconography inspired the Moldavian iconographers.²²¹

The artists were divided into four groups and painted different parts of the inside and outside walls of the church: one group painted the exterior frescoes, those from the open porch to the altar, another group painted the narthex, a different group decorated the nave, and the last group adorned the *gropnita*. The most talented group was likely the first mentioned, since they painted the most beautiful and most important frescoes of the church.²²² Sorin Ulea has a different opinion. He asserts that only one group of

²¹⁹ Nicolae Iorga was a Romanian historian, university professor, literary critic, poet, and politician. His expression “Byzantium after Byzantium” is well known in Romanian academia, and refers to Romanian art as a continuation of Byzantine art in the Romanian Principalities after the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

²²⁰ Pacurariu, *op.cit.*, p. 594.

²²¹ Dragut, *Humor*, p. 11.

²²² *Ibid.*

iconographers worked at Humor and that their leader, Toma, left the imprint of his personality in all the frescoes.²²³ However, Dragut is probably correct since one does not have to be an expert to see the obvious differences between the artistic qualities of the frescoes.

Ulea was the first to assert that Toma from Suceava was the leader of the team of iconographers. He pointed to a document written by a certain “Toma” who calls himself “church painter and subject of His Majesty Petru, ruler of Moldavia, Toma from Suceava”, although, in the document, there is no reference to the church of the Humor Monastery.²²⁴ Ulea connected this document and the presumed self-portrait of Toma in the scene of the *Fall of Constantinople*. Though the scene is very faded, one can still see a man riding a horse, leading a group of soldiers, and piercing the chest of the ruler of the Ottoman army. Above the head of the horseman is an inscription with the name “TOMA”.

²²³ Sorin Ulea, “Arta in Moldova de la mijlocul secolului al XV - lea pana la sfarsitul secolului al XVI-lea, Pictura,” in *Istoria Artelor Plastice in Romania* (Bucharest, Romania: Meridiane, 1968), p. 364.

²²⁴ Nicolae Iorga and E. Hurmuzaki eds., *Documente privitoare la istoria romanilor sec. xv* (Bucharest, Romania, 1890), doc. nr. 755, p. 400.



Picture 25: Humor, the Fall of Constantinople - Detail with the Name TOMA above the Horseman

Yet, the problems of identification remain. Although there are monastic churches where the painters signed the frescoes, none of them painted their self-portrait, which would be very unusual for an iconographer. Hence, it is difficult to accept that Toma is the name of the leading iconographer who decorated the church's walls. Thus, his identity rests on a weak supposition, and "Toma," the man riding a horse in the fresco, remains an enigma.

The constant application of a similar iconographic program to all the churches painted during Rares' period, sometimes with ingenious variations, and the interweaving of sophisticated theological themes with very local folkloric images leads to the conclusion that, in the sixteenth century, there was a Moldavian school of iconography having precise exigencies for church painting and yet open to innovations. According to Paul Henry, the Moldavian school was influenced not only by the Athonite school of iconography, but also by other different iconographic schools, such as the Serbian and Cretan schools, the

Russian school of Novgorod, and the Italian Renaissance.²²⁵ All of these influences were interwoven with inspiration from canonical and apocryphal writings along with liberties which the iconographers took to include on the frescoes local Moldavian traditions, legends, beliefs, aspirations, and ways of thinking.

4.2.3. The Uniqueness of the Exterior Frescoes of the Church of Humor Monastery

Paul Henry asserts that churches and monuments with external wall paintings existed before the Moldavian churches.²²⁶ Such monuments existed in ancient Greece, while in the Middle Ages they are found in the Balkan Peninsula, Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany, and the Romanian Principalities. For example in Transylvania, the Strei church was painted at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and the churches of Criscior and Ostrov monasteries were decorated in the fifteenth century. In Moldavia, the old church of the Moldovita's monastery was also adorned in the fifteenth century. Grabar argues that the sixteenth-century Moldavian exterior frescoes were inspired by the exterior frescos of the fourteenth-century Serbian church of Peč monastery.²²⁷ However, this church, as well as all the above-mentioned cases, has isolated exterior paintings. The uniqueness of the sixteenth century Moldavian churches in general, and of the Humor monastic church in particular, is that their outer walls are completely covered with frescoes.

What is more, these frescoes are not merely decorations but have a coherent and complex iconographic program.

²²⁵ Henry, *Les églises de la Moldavie du Nord*, p. 193.

²²⁶ Henry, *op.cit.*, pp. 226-252.

²²⁷ André Grabar, "L'origine des façades peintes des églises moldaves," p. 376.

Unlike today's exterior paintings, which tend to last no longer than one year before they fade, these have lasted for almost five centuries. The exterior frescoes of Humor are known especially for their vivid colors and the striking nuances that are created by predominance of red alongside brown (this is as famous as the blue from Voronet and the green from Sucevita). Intense blue and various shades of green are also abundant. The harmonization of the colors contributes to the great power of expression of the frescoes. There are, of course, faded sections (for example the northern wall paintings that were adversely affected over the years by climatic weathering), but we can still see fragments of the frescoes of the *Tree of Jesse* flanked by two groups of ancient philosophers, as well as the *Akathistos Hymn to the Archangel Michael*.

The exterior frescoes on the southern walls and on the altar's apses are well preserved. The iconographers extended here the themes which are depicted on the church's narthex, while adding to them two unusual scenes: the *Fall of Constantinople*, attached to the *Akathistos Hymn of the Mother of God*, and the *Heavenly Costumes*, attached to the *Last Judgment*.²²⁸ On the altar's apses are portrayed many prophets, apostles, bishops, hermits and martyrs. On the southern wall, next to the representation of the *Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God*, is depicted the life of St. Nicholas, which is illustrated with his miracles. The representation of St. Nicholas is not accidental. The legends derived from tradition assert that he was a fervent fighter against Arianism, a heresy that implicitly put into question the role of Mary as *Theotokos*.²²⁹ In the middle of the Akathistos fresco is a

²²⁸ For the iconic program of the narthex, see: Dionisie de Furna, *The Painter's manual*, p. 508 (468).

²²⁹ "Often Origen (died 254 AD) is cited as the earliest author to use the title Theotokos for Virgin Mary but the text upon which this assertion is based is not genuine (Socrates, Ecclesiastical History 7.32 citing Origen's Commentary on Romans). Dionysios of Alexandria used the term in about 250, in an epistle to Paul of Samosata. Athanasius of Alexandria in 330, Gregory the Theologian in 370, John Chrysostom in 400, and

large representation of the Holy Trinity. As we saw inside the church, the Trinity is symbolized by the three angels visiting Abraham. On the outer wall, the Trinity is depicted in a different way, with the Father portrayed as an old man, the Son as a young man, and the Holy Spirit as a dove.

One of the aims of the exterior frescoes was to describe the beliefs of Orthodox Christians. Therefore, the entire eastern part of the exterior walls, including the three apses, is devoted to the fresco of the Prayer of all Saints. It is an immense procession, arranged in tiers, converging to the altar axis, where all categories of saints (hermits, bishops, and martyrs) worship God. This impressive display of saints, alongside the representation of the *Fall of Constantinople*, is a collective invocation for the salvation of Moldavia from the Ottoman peril and for the liberation of Constantinople.²³⁰

The Ottomans are depicted on the *Fall of Constantinople* fresco and on the porch's fresco (on the western wall) representing the Last Judgment. Some scholars see in this fresco the beginning of religious intolerance in sixteenth-century Moldavia. Among those who are damned to everlasting punishment, which included laypeople and monks that had fallen into error, are pictured the Turks, the Tatars, and the Jews.²³¹ However, the Moldavian iconographers did not show them thrown directly into the river of fire, where heretics and persecutors of the Christians, for example Arius and the Roman emperor Maximian, are thrown in. They were only depicted on the periphery of hell, which is

Augustine, all used the term *Theotokos*. Theodoret wrote in 436 that calling Virgin Mary *Theotokos* was an apostolic tradition." *New World Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Theotokos>. The presence of Nicholas next to the *Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God* was often interpreted as a consequence of his fight against Arianism and implicit for Mary as being the Mother of God. See: Dragut, *Humor*, p. 30.

²³⁰ Dragut and Nicolescu, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

²³¹ Andrei Pippidi, *Byzantins, Ottomans, Roumains. Le Sud-Est européen entre l'héritage impérial et les influences occidentales* (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2006), p. 37.

symbolized by the river of fire. Thus, they are given a ‘chance’ for salvation, if only they would repent and convert to Christianity. Moreover, the group is led by Moses, and it would be unacceptable for the group to be condemned to everlasting punishment. Moses has in his left hand an open parchment inscribed with the Ten Commandments, whereas he points with his right hand to Christ, depicted as the Judge of the world, to whom they could ask for mercy.



Picture 26 The Last Judgment from the open porch – detail

The upper zone of the fresco has an intense blue background, covered with golden stars. This part is reserved for Christ *Pantokrator* surrounded by angels. Christ is flanked by St. John the Baptist and the Mother of God, both of whom are facing towards Him with their hands raised up in prayer for humanity. This is a traditional depiction of *Deesis* (prayer). The next register has the Apostles seated on a bench assisted by angels ready for the judgment of the world. The middle of the fresco has the throne of *hetoimasia*, a symbol of the Last Judgment, and on the left and right sides are Adam and Eve, who represent

humanity, kneeling. While on the left side of the throne of *hetoimasia* is the group led by Moses, on the right the Apostle Paul led the group of saints. On the lower left, the fortress of Paradise is depicted with Peter opening its gates for righteous souls. In the middle of Paradise are the Mother of God, the saved thief, and the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who carry in their bosoms all the saved souls.

The left side is separated from the right by a river of fire, which is for those convicted to eternal punishment. On the lower left, the archangels announce the Last Judgment. Their trumpets are shaped like the *bucium*, a Romanian wind instrument belonging to local shepherds. At their announcement, the souls of all humanity return to life, from their graves or from the animals that devoured them, in order to face judgment. There are also depicted the death of a righteous man, with an angel receiving in his hands the soul of the dead and David playing the *cobza*, - another Moldavian musical string instrument - and the death of a sinner, with his soul expelled into Hades.

In the fresco of the Last Judgment there is inserted the theme of *customs gates* inspired by folk legends. In the *customs gates*, the souls are judged as soon as they die and they go through several barriers before they can enter Paradise, with the angels' help, after having paid tribute to devil publicans.²³² In Moldavia there still is the practice of throwing coins into a dead person's coffin to help the soul pay tribute to the devils.

²³² The *customs gates*, influenced by folk legends, are different from Toll Houses. "The teaching of Aerial Toll-Houses regards the soul's journey after its departure from the body, and is related to the particular judgment. In its most general form, it refers to the idea that after death, the demons attempt to find a basis for taking the soul to Hades, while the angels and the prayers of the living defend the soul if it can be defended. Whether, the soul is finally seized by the demons, or taken to heaven depends on the state of the soul at death. In either case, the soul then experiences a foretaste of what it can expect after the final judgment. According to Fr. Thomas Hopko, the teaching of the Toll Houses is found in virtually in the writings of every Father of the Church'. In the life of St. Anthony the Great, he saw a vision of souls rising towards heaven and some being stopped by a large demon and cast down. Likewise St. Bede recorded certain visions of a Celtic Saint who saw a soul arising and fighting off demons with the help of angels and his reposed wife's soul."

The fresco of the Last Judgment was a theme of exceptional interest for iconographers of sixteenth century Moldavia because of its eschatological and moral meaning. It is pictured on several of the churches' outer walls. The church of Humor monastery was one of the first churches to be painted with exterior frescoes. Thus, its fresco of the Last Judgment might have served as a model for all later Moldavian churches depicting this scene on their outer walls.

4.2.4. The Interior Frescoes of the Church: The Altar

The interior paintings of the altar adhere to the iconographic plan for Orthodox churches.²³³ On the altar's apse is a monumental representation of the Mother of God seated on the throne with the Christ-Child on her lap and surrounded by four archangels. While the representation of the *Theotokos* with archangels was very often used in Moldavia, some examples of which can be found at Saint Elijah's church, at Popauti and Neamt monasteries, the one at Humor is considered the most beautiful.²³⁴

Below this fresco, there are portrayed twelve bishops, with each of them framed in small medallions. On the next register are the Apostles receiving from Christ the Eucharist in two separate images: the one with the Apostles receiving the bread, and the other with them receiving the wine. Jesus Christ is depicted as an archbishop in the liturgical service assisted by an angel. The Apostles are in front of a church's altar with baldachin, and on the altar's table are various liturgical objects.

http://orthodoxwiki.org/Aerial_Toll-Houses#cite_note-0, and Fr. Thomas Hopko on the Toll-houses, http://audio.ancientfaith.com/illuminatedheart/hopko_tolls.mp3.

²³³ See Dionisie de Furna, *The Painter's Manual*, pp. 496(456) - 507(467).

²³⁴ Dragut, *Humor*, p. 11.

The fresco is a transposition of the Orthodox ritual of priests receiving the Eucharist from a bishop who participates in the liturgy. They receive Holy Communion in hierarchical order: first the bishops, then the priests, and finally the deacons. One sees on the two frescoes mentioned above the same ritual with Christ regarded as a bishop and the Apostles as priests. The frescoes are bordered on the left side by the fresco illustrating Christ washing the Apostles' feet and at the right by the fresco depicting the Last Supper.

The next row is reserved for the Orthodox Church's archbishops, who are chosen from four categories: the doctors of the Church, the warriors for the Christian faith, the martyrs, and the authors of the Orthodox liturgies.²³⁵ The inscriptions identify them as Saints Partenios, Peter of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria, Spyridon, Gregory of Nanzianzus, John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Nicholas, Cyril of Jerusalem, Nikephoros, Teoctist, and Hylarion.

In the anaphorium are represented St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, and the vision of St. Peter of Alexandria. The vision is described in the *Prologue*, a book containing the daily readings of lives of the Saints for the Church year.²³⁶ St. Peter excommunicated Arius for his sympathy with the Meletian schism.²³⁷ According to the *Prologue*, when Arius learned that archbishop Peter had been imprisoned and condemned to death, he sent priests and deacons to him asking for forgiveness. Arius expected to be accepted back into the communion of the church, but St. Peter refused his request because of a vision in which Christ had appeared to him as a child wearing a garment torn from

²³⁵ Stefanescu, *op.cit.*, p. 72-73.

²³⁶ Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, *The Prologue from Ochrid: Lives of the Saints and Homilies for Every Day in the Year*, translated by Mother Marina, vol. 3. (Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986), pp. 239-240.

²³⁷ For information on Meletian schism, see: Leslie W. Barnard, "Athanasius and the Meletian Schism in Egypt," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 59 (1973), pp. 181-189.

head to toe. When St.Peter asked the Lord who it was that rent his garment, he answered that it was Arius, and that he must not be received back into communion.

In the *diaconicum*, St.Simon is depicted carrying the Christ Child in his arms. On the vault's arch that is placed in the space between the altar and the nave are pictured prophets and bishops in three rows of medallions. On the axle is illustrated the throne of *hetoimasia*, meaning 'that which has been prepared' or 'that which is made ready', specifically referring to the 'sign of the Son of Man' and the throne of the Last Judgment.

Paul Henry and Władysław Podlacha hold that these frescoes show an Italian Renaissance influence, but were not able to explain how such an influence arrived at Humor Monastery.²³⁸ Moreover, in Podlacha's opinion, the iconographers were preoccupied, not only by the symbolic content of the images, but also by the narrative of the events and the interior fillings of the holy personages, making the depictions more human like.²³⁹

4.2.5. The Iconostasis

The iconostasis of the church follows the Byzantine model, and it is one of the most beautiful and oldest in Romania.

²³⁸ Henry, *op.cit.*, p. 182.

²³⁹ W. Podlacha, *Moldawidła science w cerkwiach Bukowiny*, Lwow, 1912, cited by Paul Henry in *Les églises de la Moldavie du Nord*, p. 182.



Picture 27: The Sixteenth Century Iconostasis – Church of Humor Monastery

The iconostasis was made in the sixteenth century of sculpted and gilded sycamore maple wood.²⁴⁰ Like the majority of Byzantine iconostases, it contains three rows or levels. The first level is called the Sovereign Row and is composed of four icons. The first two are of Jesus Christ, placed to the right of the royal doors, and of the Mother of God *Hodegetria*, placed on the left.²⁴¹ The other two are of the Archangel Michael and of the Dormition of the Mother of God (the dedication day of the church), which are placed on the left and right sides of the north and south doors called the deacons' doors.²⁴² These

²⁴⁰ Dragut and Nicolescu, *op.cit.*, p. 173.

²⁴¹ The royal doors or central doors are placed in the middle of the iconostasis. Through them, only the priest can enter or exit the altar, when he reads from the Gospels, when he blesses the congregation, and with the Holy Gifts. The doors remain shut whenever a service is not being held. Modern custom as to when they should be opened during services varies depending upon jurisdiction and local custom. In Byzantine times, though, the emperor would also come through the royal doors to preach to the congregation, due to the Byzantine concept of *symphonia* (or harmony) between church and state, which allowed for that as a privilege granted to Byzantine emperors by the church. See: Deno. J Geanakoplos, "Church and State in the Byzantine Empire: A Reconsideration of the Problem of Caesaropapism," *Church History* 34 (1965), pp. 381-403.

²⁴² The north and south doors are often called deacons' doors because the deacons use them frequently. Alternatively, they may be called *angels' doors*, because the Archangels Michael and Gabriel are often depicted on them.

icons represent a climax of the post-Byzantine art in Moldavia and are the most representative icons of Petru Rares' period.²⁴³

The second row painted in the eighteenth century is the Feasts tier and contains the icons of the twelve great feasts of the liturgical year.²⁴⁴ The third row, painted in the sixteenth century, includes the icon of the *Deesis*, with St. John the Baptist and the *Theotokos*, including the icons of the Apostles. At the very top of the iconostasis there is a large cross, and on either side of it are the icons of the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist. Behind the cross there is a note which mentions that Gheorghe Movila, the archbishop of Suceava, made the cross in the days of Prince Petru Schiopul (on 15 August 1590), at the time when the archimandrite of Humor Monastery was Anastasie.²⁴⁵ Decorative registers with vegetal motifs, sculpted in gilded and painted sycamore maple wood, separate the icons on the iconostasis.

The icons on the iconostasis are not *decorations* as such, they are an integral part of the whole liturgical celebration, and the community celebrates the liturgy *within* and *with* the whole Church.

4.2.6. The Nave

The nave of the Orthodox church is reserved for laypersons, and there take place a number of rituals in this area of the church, such as marriage and burial services. In the Orthodox architectural vision, the nave represents the saving intervention of God in the

²⁴³ According to a local legend, the icons were not painted during Rares' reign but during that of Alexandru, and they were the only icons that were saved when the first monastery at Humor was destroyed. Dragut and Nicolescu, *op.cit.*, p. 173.

²⁴⁴ In the Orthodox Church, there are twelve great feasts: eight for Jesus Christ, and four for the Mother of God.

²⁴⁵ Dragut and Nicolescu, *op.cit.*, p. 173. Gheorghe Movila was Archbishop of Suceava between 1588 and 1591 during the reign of Prince Petru Schiopul.

lives of believers. The walls of the nave are decorated accordingly, in order that the believers might be able to see God's work on their behalf. As a result, the walls are covered on the upper level with scenes from the life of Jesus Christ, from his birth to his Passion, Crucifixion, Death and Resurrection. This is a vivid representation of the ongoing work of God's plan of salvation. There is a transposition of images from the biblical texts, which respects the recommendation of the Byzantine canons of representation.²⁴⁶ On the lower section are portrayed the military saints, and on the upper part of the western wall there is the *Dormition of the Mother of God*.

On the southern wall are scenes of the healing of the man who was blind from birth (Jn 9:1-12), of the healing of a paralytic (Lk 5:17-26), and of Jesus Christ with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (Jn 4:1-26). Between the last two images, one can see the traditional Orthodox representation of the Trinity, symbolized by the three angels visiting Abraham and Sarah at the Mamre oak tree (Gn18:1-5). This fresco is also entitled *Abraham's Hospitality* and shows the foreshadowing of a later revelation of the Trinity. Due to the striking beauty of its execution, this fresco was sometimes likened to the most famous icon of the Holy Trinity painted by the Russian iconographer Andrei Rublev (1360/70?-1430?).²⁴⁷

On the northern wall, alongside other frescoes representing passages from the New Testament, is the Apostle Thomas touching the wounds of the resurrected Christ (Jn 20:24-29). This is the first time in Romanian medieval iconography that the doubting Thomas theme is illustrated.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Bals, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

²⁴⁷ Petru Comarnescu, *Indreptar artistic al monumentelor din Nordul Moldovei* (Suceava, Romania, 1961), p. 251.

²⁴⁸ Dragut, *Humor*, p. 14.

On the fresco that decorates the central dome of the church, which in the Orthodox church architectural theology represents heaven, is depicted Christ *Pantokrator* surrounded by angels, patriarchs, prophets and the four Evangelists. The half-length portrait of Christ appears in ‘heaven’, which opens itself for the believers to see him. In each ‘heavenly’ corner (on the pendentives), the Evangelists are portrayed bent over the manuscripts of their respective Gospels.

Christ’s halo is inscribed with a cross. The cross is marked with the Greek letters O ΩN, which means “I am the Existing One” (the name used for God in Exodus 3:14) and is used in iconography to symbolize Christ’s divinity. On his right and left sides are inscribed the initials of his name in Greek: IC XC.²⁴⁹ By these inscriptions, the fresco declares the two natures of Jesus Christ: the divine and the human. Christ’s right hand is raised as a sign of blessing. The fingers are curved in the shape of the letters abbreviating his name in Greek. The shape of his fingers can be read in an alternate way: the three fingers that touch represent the Holy Trinity, to which he belongs, and the two vertical fingers signify that he is fully God and fully man.

Next to Christ *Pantokrator*, on the inner surface of the diagonal arches, are depicted the following themes: God the Father between David and Solomon, Jesus Emmanuel between Daniel and Joel, Christ between Jeremiah and Zachariah, and, again, Christ between Amos and Ezekiel.

²⁴⁹ “For Christians, ‘Christ’ has become a name, one part of the proper name ‘Jesus Christ.’ Originally, however, this word was not a proper name, but a title. *Christos* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word for ‘Messiah,’ the ‘anointed one.’” Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus God and Man* (Philadelphia, Penn.: The Westminster Press, 1968), pp. 30-31.

These are only the main themes represented on the walls of the nave. Other secondary themes and many saints are portrayed on medallions. All the themes have as inspirational sources the Old or New Testaments and the history of the Church represented by portraits of patriarchs, prophets, martyrs and other Christian personalities. Saints depicted in frescoes, along with Christians on earth who struggled for their salvation, form the communion of saints. Although physically separated by the barrier of death, they remain united as one Church, together in liturgy and in prayer.

4.2.7. The Narthex

Before focusing on the narthex, I would like to turn briefly to the *gropnita*, which is situated between the nave and the narthex. In the *gropnita* are illustrated the life of the Mother of God, the miracles of the Archangel Michael, female saints, and martyrs. The *gropnita* is separated from the narthex by a breakthrough wall, which has above it a representation of the Mandylion, ‘the icon not made by human hands.’

In the dome of the narthex is a beautiful large fresco portraying the *Lady of the Sign*. Surrounding her are sixteen standing angels, motionless or in motion, forming a majestic guard of honour. In the next register are illustrated twenty-five prophets, characterized by impetuous movement that rumple the curtains and leave the clothes blowing in the wind, a typical trait of sixteenth-century iconography.²⁵⁰ The prophets are, from left to right, Moses (holding a bush), Aaron (carrying his rod), Solomon (carrying a temple), Isaiah (with his tongs), Jacob (with his ladder), Gideon (offering wool), Daniel (carrying a little mountain),

²⁵⁰ Henry, *op.cit.*, p. 213.

Elijah, Joel, Abdias, Samuel, Malachi, Ezra, Amos, Hosea, Nahum Elisha, Habakkuk, Jonah, Zechariah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and David.²⁵¹

Moved by the beauty of this fresco, Paul Henry wrote:

La grandeur de cette vision hors des temps est imposante ; mais ce qui mérite d'être mis encore mieux en pleine lumière, c'est que nulle part en Moldavie le sens architectural dans la décoration n'est plus grand, nulle part l'utilisation de la surface sphérique mieux comprise. Que dis-je, dans tout l'art chrétien il est peu de monument qui, par la justesse du trait et la vigueur des attitudes, et avant tout par l'habileté de l'agencement des registres et par la symétrie de l'ensemble, puissent offrir quelque chose de plus satisfaisant pour l'œil le plus exigeant. L'art italien, dans ce domaine, n'a rien de plus beau, et l'artiste parait avoir retrouvé sans effort la grande tradition byzantine, et le sens profond de la composition architecturale qui caractérise par exemple le Baptistère des Orthodoxes de Ravenne.²⁵²



Picture 28: Our Lady of the Sign

²⁵¹ For each name of the prophets represented, I consulted the list in Paul Henry's book: *Les églises de la Moldavie du Nord*, p. 213.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

Under the fresco of the Virgin Mary, there is a level depicting the Seven Ecumenical Councils: on the eastern part of the wall, the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325), under the patronage of Emperor Constantine; on the south side, the Second and Third Ecumenical Councils, of Constantinople I (381) and Ephesus (431); on the west side are the Councils of Chalcedon (451) and Constantinople II (553). Finally, on the north wall are the Councils of Constantinople III (680) and of Nicaea II (787).

The row below the Ecumenical Councils is reserved for the lives of the saints for the months of September, October, and November. One of the most beautiful images is that of St. John Chrysostom holding an open book from which a river springs and from which everybody, young and old, laity and monks, drinks. It is a beautiful depiction of St. John's oratorical gift.



Picture 29: Saint John Chrysostom

Usually, the walls in the narthex of Moldavian churches are covered with the lives of saints for the entire Orthodox calendar. In the sixteenth century (and even today), the beginning of the liturgical calendar was (and is) September 1st.²⁵³ At Humor, the frescoes started with that month, but we do not know why there are illustrated only the saints for the months of September, October, and November. The walls are divided into ninety-two small panels (twenty-three on each wall) in which saints are standing, carrying in their hands gospels or crosses. Especially vivid are the scenes depicting the martyrdoms of each saint. Thanks to inscriptions, one can easily identify all the images.

The lower level is reserved for the pious and hermits. They are identified by the inscriptions above them. At the bottom of the eastern wall is a faded votive painting dating from 1555, which, according to the inscription, portrays Daniil, the minister of war and chief magistrate of Suceava with his wife Teodosia giving to the Mother of God an arch and a censer.²⁵⁴

²⁵³ The date September 1st is apparently the ‘beginning of the liturgical year.’ Pascha is actually the beginning of the liturgical year. September 1st was the beginning of the Byzantine *civil* year. We erroneously think of it as the beginning of the liturgical year because the liturgical books begin the immovable cycle on that date. But that is only in order to conform to the (old) civic New Year.

²⁵⁴ For the content of the inscription and the details on all gifts these family gave to the Humor Monastery, see Teodor Balan, “Manastirea Humor,” *Mitropolia Moldovei si Sucevei* 33 (1957), pp. 137-50.



Picture 30: The Votive Painting of Daniil and His Wife Teodosia

Although all the icons and frescoes presented above are of exceptional value for Moldavian art, it is the iconic program of the church's *gropnita* that is without parallel, not only in Moldavia, but also in Romanian Orthodoxy in general. It is to the *gropnita* that we now turn.

4.3. The *Gropnita* Placed in the Church of Humor Monastery, a Moldavian Innovation

During the sixteenth century, a *gropnita* was introduced into Moldavian church architecture, between the nave and the narthex. This unique architectural innovation, first

present in the church of Humor Monastery, has no parallel in the Orthodox world.²⁵⁵ The burial of important officials or benefactors next to churches was popular in Orthodoxy, but this took place in separate chapels annexed to the main church.²⁵⁶ Scholars have interpreted differently the reason for the introduction of this architectural novelty. Paul Henry explains it as a form of veneration that the church's benefactor received after his/her death.²⁵⁷ Thus, he/she could be buried close to the place where the liturgy took place, but not in the nave. Virgil Vatasianu sees the introduction of the funerary space between the nave and narthex as a solution for increasing the church's interior space.²⁵⁸ Corina Nicolescu emphasizes the social-political context and considers the funerary room as a space that isolates the benefactors' graves and separates the nave from the narthex. The former was reserved exclusively for the prince and the clergy, while the latter was reserved exclusively for boyars and courtiers.²⁵⁹

Ecaterina Buculei disagrees with Nicolescu's opinion. Instead, she suggests that a church, although paid for by a prince or a boyar, was supposed to serve a larger community, and thus the exclusion of ordinary people from the liturgy was inconceivable.²⁶⁰ In addition, the idea of increasing the church's interior space as Vatasianu holds is not plausible, because the *gropnita* usually throttled the church's space.

²⁵⁵ Maria Craciun, "Apud Ecclesia: Church Burial and the Development of Funerary Rooms in Moldavia," in *Sacred Space in the Early Modern Europe*, edited by Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 144-167.

²⁵⁶ Ecaterina Cincheza Buculei, "Programul iconographic al gropnitelor moldovenesti (sec. xvi)," in *Arta Romaneasca, arta europeana. Centenar Virgil Vatasianu*, edited by Mihai Porumb (Oradea, Romania, 2002), p. 86.

²⁵⁷ Henry, *Les églises de la Moldavie du Nord.*, p. 144.

²⁵⁸ Virgil Vatasianu, *Istoria artei feudale in Tarile Romane* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Academiei RPR, 1959), p. 310.

²⁵⁹ Corina Nicolescu, "Arta in epoca lui Stefan cel Mare. Antecedentele si etapele de dezvoltare ale artei moldovenesti din epoca lui Stefan cel Mare," in *Cultura moldoveneasca in timpul lui Stefan cel Mare. Culegere de studii* (Bucharest, Romania, 1964), pp. 339-341.

²⁶⁰ Many kings and emperors in the medieval period understood property differently than we do today. A king who came up with the money to build a church considered it his property and took it for granted that he had

In Buculei's opinion, the inclusion of the *gropnita* into the architecture of the church between the nave and narthex might have a different explanation.²⁶¹ In Orthodox theology, death is considered to be a person's rest in sleep expecting the resurrection of the dead (John 11:11-13) at the second coming of Christ (1 Thess. 4: 13-14). Thus, the ideal place to await the resurrection of the dead for the benefactor's family was in a church built and offered to Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Hence, the inclusion of the *gropnita* into such a church would be an expression of the resurrection faith.

In Orthodox churches during the liturgy, men and women generally stand separately, with men standing on the right and women on the left. The Humor church's nave is extremely small and could not accommodate a large number of participants who, in addition, had to be divided into two separate groups of men and women. It is possible, though evidence is lacking, that alongside the place for the benefactor's family graves, the *gropnita* was reserved for women participants to the liturgy, whereas the small nave was reserved for the men. Consequently, the *gropnita*'s walls were covered with female saints, examples of holiness for women.

In general, iconographers chose to cover the *gropnita*'s walls with scenes from the lives of different saints, who were considered as intercessors before God for humanity. In the *gropnita* of the church of Humor Monastery, alongside the female saints, the iconographer had ingeniously chosen to depict the most beloved intercessors, not only for

the right to appoint bishops and priests for that particular church. I think Buculei is aware of the medieval understanding of property, but she refers here only to the monastic churches that were meant to serve a larger community, and not solely the prince's family. Buculei, "Programul iconographic al gropnitelor moldovenesti," p. 86.

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 86.

the salvation of the souls of the dead, but also for the salvation of the Christian world from domination by the Ottoman Turks - the Mother of God and the Archangel Michael.

4.3.1. The frescoes in the *gropnita*

If one compares the frescoes from the *gropnita* with those from the narthex, the nave, the altar, or those from the exterior walls of the church, one can easily notice that the iconographer who painted the majority of the frescoes from the *gropnita* was not the same as the one who painted the other walls of the church. The drawings from the *gropnita* are more rigid and the chromatic palette is less sophisticated, although the tones of the colors are well harmonized. Except for the lower register of the *gropnita* depicting the votive portraits of Toader Buduiog and his wife Anastasia, painted by the iconographer of the narthex (in the same style and colors), the rest of the frescoes are painted by another hand. The latter is worthy of interest, especially for his familiarity with the iconographical representations and for his knowledge of the Old and New Testaments, the hagiographical tradition, the Orthodox Tradition in general, and the apocryphal writings, all of which are depicted in the frescoes. The paintings can be adequately studied thanks to the work of removing the layers of smoke and salt that was condensed on them, an effort undertaken by a UNESCO-led international team in 1972.

Contrary to the artists who painted the altar, the nave and the narthex, the iconographer who painted the *gropnita* was free from canonical requirements and could therefore choose the themes he wanted for the frescoes.²⁶² He painted, on the lower (first) level, twenty-one female saints, having as source of inspiration the hagiographical writings

²⁶² *The Painter's Manual* of de Furna comprises the themes for all the parts of the church, except the *gropnita* since the *gropnita* was not part of the church. de Furna, *.op.cit.*, pp. 496 (456)-518(478) .

about their lives. The saints are easily identifiable as they have their names written above them. They are portrayed carrying crosses in their hands, sign of their martyrdom.



Picture 31: Female Saints – detail

Saint Marina is not depicted with a cross as all the other female saints are, but she has in her right hand a hammer and in her left hand a defeated devil. Her *vita* describes her battling with a demon and how she defeated him with a hammer. At Humor, the iconographer depicted her as a victor over the devil.²⁶³

²⁶³ Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, *The Prologue from Ochrid; Lives of the Saints and Homilies for Every Day in the Year*, translated by Mother Marina vol. 3 (Birmingham: Lazarica Press, 1986), pp. 73-74.



Picture 32: Saint Marina

On the second level of the *gropnita*'s wall are depicted sixteen scenes with the Archangel Michael. To my knowledge this is the only church painted during Petru Rares' reign having such an extensive iconic program of the miracles performed by Archangel Michael.

4.3.2. The Archangel Michael in *Gropnita*'s Frescoes

In the Orthodox Tradition, the Archangel Michael is considered the 'guide of souls' because he leads souls to heaven where they are judged. The Tradition is based on the Letter of Jude (Jude 1:9) that describes the dispute which the Archangel Michael had with Satan over the body of Moses, and also in the book of Daniel (Dan 12:1), where the Archangel is described as the one who will take care of people whose names are written in the *Book of Life*. The depiction of Michael on the *gropnita*'s walls is directly connected to the Last Judgment, as in the Orthodox Tradition he is identified as the intercessor who

brings the souls of the dead in front of God for judgment (Dan 12:1-13; Jude 9; Rev 12:7). Therefore, his presence on the walls of the *gropnita* is understandable, because in the Orthodox Tradition he is also believed to be the conqueror of Satan, not only at the luciferic fall, but also at the end of times when he will defeat the Antichrist (Revelation 12:7).

One may presume that the depiction of the Archangel Michael in the *gropnita* is due to the deep veneration the monks of Humor had for him by the traditional association of the ascetic life with 'the angelic life'. Moreover, the monks understood their life as a combat against the demons under the leadership of the Archangel Michael. Thus, the Archangel is portrayed with Pachomius, the founder of Christian monasticism, on each side of the entrance to the *gropnita*. Unusually, the Archangel Michael, who seems to be having a conversation with Pachomius, is dressed as a monk. In his right hand is an opened parchment, and his left hand points towards his monastic hood, an allusion to the monastic life compared to the angelic life. The Archangel Michael has even a royal icon on the iconostasis, in place of the icon of Saint Nicholas or Saint John the Baptist, who are usually represented next to the Mother of God, emphasizing the degree of veneration accorded to the Archangel in the monastic establishment at Humor.



Picture 33: Archangel Michael and Saint Pachomius

Finally, the Archangel Michael was considered, alongside the Mother of God, to be a helper to the Moldavian princes in their attempt to keep or to regain Moldavian independence from Ottoman occupation. Prince Petru Rares embraced his father's belief that the Archangel Michael stands, after the Mother of God, as the great support of Moldavian soldiers in battle. It is worth mentioning that in the church of Patrauti Monastery, founded by Prince Stephen the Great, there is an original composition entitled the *Procession of the Holy Cross*. A holy army of saints, who have been killed during anti-Christian persecutions, are represented on horseback and are armed. This is not a historical scene, but one that takes place in heaven. The Archangel Michael, who leads the army, is followed by Emperor Constantine the Great, Saint George, Demetrius the Great, Teodor Tiron and Stratilat, Procopius, and other brave soldiers considered eternal-warriors for Christ, all of whom are depicted in a sort of aura of love and prayer around the cross. The fresco is a prayer through which the Archangel Michael and the military martyrs were invoked in the service of the prince's earthly armies that were fighting to preserve Moldavian Christian identity against the Muslim Ottomans. Hence, it is no wonder that the

Archangel Michael found a special place in Moldavian iconography under the rule of Prince Rares, whose goals were the independence of Moldavia and the liberation of Constantinople from Ottoman occupation.

In the *gropnita* of the church at Humor monastery are depicted sixteen scenes with Archangel Michael as the main personage. These are divided into three groups, according to the literary sources which they illustrate: miracles of the Archangel Michael narrated in the Old and New Testaments, and in the *Lives of Saints*.

The iconographer depicted two scenes from the Old Testament. On the one hand, there is the encounter Joshua had with the Archangel Michael in his campaign in the Promised Land (Jos 5: 13-15). On the other hand, there is the encounter Hezekiah had with him, where the Archangel helped Hezekiah to defeat the Assyrian army during the siege of Jerusalem (2 Kg 18-19). Together, these scenes emphasize the aid in battle which the chosen people of God of the Old Testament received from the Archangel Michael.²⁶⁴



Picture 34: The Archangel Michael and Joshua

²⁶⁴ These two frescoes place together Scriptures and tradition since 'Michael' is not specifically mentioned in the Old Testament.



Picture 35: The Archangel Michael and Hezekiah

The iconographer also illustrated scenes from the New Testament. One of these is the liberation of Saint Peter from prison (Acts 12:1-11). Here, the iconographer identified the unnamed angel who helped Peter as the Archangel Michael. The event of the liberation of St. Peter entered the Orthodox calendar as a feast, named the “Veneration of the Precious Chains of the Holy and All-Glorious Apostle Peter,” commemorated on January 16th. The feast celebrates the miraculous falling off of the chains from St. Peter’s wrists and also of the chains in which he was held before his martyrdom by Emperor Nero. The painter of the *gropnita* did not show Peter with broken chains, but he depicted the encounter Peter had with the angel, depicted here as the Archangel Michael.



Picture 36: Archangel Michael and Saint Peter

Finally, from the *Lives of Saints*, the iconographer chose to represent the miracle of the Archangel Michael at Chonae, commemorated on September 6. The book narrates that at Chonae was a stream of water, which Michael has drawn from the rock when he visited that place.²⁶⁵ All who drank from this spring or bathed in it were healed from bodily diseases. Next to the stream was erected a church, where many pilgrims used to come. The authorities of the town, who did not like the pilgrimage to the church, redirected the stream against the sanctuary to destroy it. Archippus, the priest of the church, prayed asking help from the Archangel Michael who appeared and split a rock commanding the water to flow into the stone, thus saving the church. Afterwards, the stream was always absorbed into the stone.

²⁶⁵ Velimirovic, *op.cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 295-296. The description of the feast can also be found in the Orthodox calendar posted on the website of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in America: <http://www.goarch.org/chapel/saints/195/?searchterm=Archangel%20Michael%20at%20Chonae> (accessed on December 2009).



Picture 37: The Miracle of the Archangel Michael at Chonae

The frescoes irrupt with the scene unveiling the power of the Archangel Michel in battles, helping the men of God and protecting the Christian Church. However, above this level of frescoes, there is a fresco series depicting the life of the most beloved and greatest among saints, namely the Mother of God, whose intercessory prayers towards Jesus Christ surpass those of all others saints. The Mother of God, honored more than the Cherubim and the Seraphim, was called not only to intercede on behalf of the souls of the dead and to help believers in need, but also for the protection of Orthodox Moldavia and for the liberation of Constantinople.²⁶⁶ The iconic cycle dedicated to her is more elaborate than that of any other saint. Thus, alongside the exterior church frescoes and the interior

²⁶⁶ In the liturgical hymns, the Mother of God is honored more than the Cherubim and she has more glory when compared to the Seraphim. See: Saint John Chrysostom, *The Divine Liturgy*, compiled by Bishop Fan Stylian Noli, New Liturgical Series no.3, The Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America, 1975, p. 89.

frescoes where she is depicted, the iconographer chose to display her life on the church's *gropnita*.

In considering this series of frescoes, the most challenging question is the following: what was the literary source for the iconographer? Was it the *Protogospel of James*, an apocryphal book describing the life of the Mother of God, or was it the *Synaxarion*, the Orthodox compilation of the lives of the saints? Or was it both? These questions will be the focus of inquiry in the next chapter.

4.4. Conclusion

The church of Humor Monastery was built under the rule of Prince Petru Rares, who also founded many other Moldavian churches and monastic establishments and provided financial support for some monastic dwellings on Mount Athos, Greece. His generosity might be seen as an expression of his devout Orthodox faith, but it can also be linked to his political interests. As many other Orthodox Christians, Rares naively hoped to be the liberator of Constantinople from Ottoman occupation. In order to achieve his purpose, he tried to establish military alliances with other Christian countries and asked monks to pray to the Mother of God, held as the protectress of Constantinople, for his victory. Above all, however, he commissioned the constructions of churches dedicated to the Mother of God and also to saints considered as helpers in battles (e.g. Saints Constantine and Helen – Constantin was the founder of Constantinople - Saint George, the Archangels Michael and Gabriel). There is evidence of Rares' direct influence on the churches' iconographical program, one of them, the fresco of the *Fall of Constantinople*, depicted on the outer wall of the church of Humor Monastery.

At Humor, two monastic establishments were found, the oldest one dating from before 1415. Destroyed in 1528, its ruins can still be seen today a short distance from the present monastery. The second church, dedicated to the Mother of God, was built in 1530 during the reign of Prince Petru Rares. In 1641, during the reign of Prince Vasile Lupu, the monastery was reinforced with a defense tower and protective walls. Today, of the old monastic complex there remains only the church from Rares' reign and the tower from that of Lupu.

Instinctively or deliberately the Moldavian architects used the golden ratio for proportions. In either case, their acute sense of harmony and proportion had the result that the church of Humor Monastery became a precious Moldavian monument. The architecture gave iconographers the opportunity to find ingenious solutions for the interior and exterior frescoes of the church. The painters had as source of inspiration the tradition of Byzantine iconography and harmoniously united it with influences from Russian, Athonite, Cretan and Serbian schools of Orthodox iconography, and from the Italian Renaissance. Alongside the depiction of the liturgical texts and of the Old and New Testaments, the iconographers took the liberty to include in the frescoes apocryphal writings, details from the *Synaxarion*, local traditions, legends, beliefs, and aspirations of the Moldavians of the epoch.

The practice of painting on the outer walls of churches, from the ground to the cupola, was introduced during the reign of Prince Rares and ended about fifty years after his death. This practice became the leading architectural mode, but fell out of fashion almost as fast as it began, ending with the church of Sucevita monastery in 1600. Although the art of exterior painting was rather short-lived, it is probably the most beautiful and fascinating art that Moldavia ever produced. The churches' exterior frescoes are painted in

the same manner, with the same subjects and the same distributions of themes and the general concept of painted decorations are very similar in all the monuments. For these reasons André Grabar asserts that during the sixteenth century, there existed a Moldavian school of iconography.²⁶⁷ The iconographers did not have canons of paintings for the exterior walls and, therefore, they chose to transfer themes that were normally depicted on the walls of the narthex.

During the sixteenth century, some Moldavian churches had cultural centers. One of them was at the Humor Monastery, which produced different artistic works from icons to illuminated manuscripts. There are still many valuable pieces of art at this monastery. However, many others were lost or destroyed over the centuries. The nuns residing there hope to open one day a museum for visitors to see the remarkable treasures of art which the monastery still has.²⁶⁸

Although there is not yet a museum, the presence of precious treasures in the church of Humor Monastery is extraordinary when one considers the frescoes: it is remarkable how well preserved they are in images, passages from the Old and New Testaments, traditions of Orthodoxy, stories from apocryphal writings, and the political aspirations of Prince Rares. Of particular interest is the unique character of the *gropnita*, both as an architectural feat and for its fresco series. All the frescoes in the *gropnita* are fascinating since one can see the intercessory prayers which the community asked from the saints for their salvation in the life to come after death and also for their earthly life of struggle in facing the Ottoman invasion.

²⁶⁷ André Grabar, "L'origine des façades peintes des églises," p. 375.

²⁶⁸ The nuns told me that they want to establish a museum at the monastery.

The first part of the dissertation presented the historical and artistic background of sixteenth-century Moldavia for a better understanding of how the piety and political ambitions of Prince Rares gave birth to the unique church of Humor Monastery and what impact the secular events of the time had on the iconic program. This contextual study, guided by the use of the historical organic model of interpretation, has provided the necessary framework to conduct a detailed analysis of the artistic and theological elements of the iconic program of the “Life of the Mother of God” in the *gropnita*, at this point one of the most important yet ignored elements of the monastic complex at Humor.

PART II THE STUDY OF THE SERIES OF FRESCOES DEPICTING THE LIFE OF THE MOTHER OF GOD IN THE *GROPNITA* OF THE CHURCH AT HUMOR MONASTERY

Introduction to Part II

While the first part of the dissertation presented the governance of Prince Petru Rares (1527-1538 /1541-1546) and his direct influence on the iconographical program of Moldavian churches, the second part will analyze the fresco series, unique in Moldavian iconography, depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” in the church’s *gropnita*. The *Painter’s Manual* does not contain prescriptions concerning the depiction of the life of the *Theotokos*, and there are no other Moldavian churches with this iconic program.²⁶⁹ Thus, the question is: what was the literary source for the Moldavian iconographer in depicting this series of frescoes? A theologian or a liturgist might argue that the *Synaxarion* was the major source since this book contains the lives of the saints of the Orthodox Church. Moreover, in Moldavian iconography, the *Synaxarion* was used as a literary source for the depiction of the lives of the saints. This is evident in the fresco series that shows the life or martyrdom of the saint(s) for each day of the liturgical year. These are depicted in the narthex of the majority (if not all) of monastic churches and precisely titled the *Synaxarion*.

Yet another question arises: what is the source of the *Synaxarion*’s stories about the Mother of God? To this second question, an exegete might propose the *Protogospel of James*.²⁷⁰ An art historian might also argue that the fresco series has as its main and ultimate source the *Protogospel of James* since many art historians drew this conclusion

²⁶⁹ See: Paul Hetherington transl. *The Painter’s Manual of Dionysius of Fournia* (Torrance, California: Oakwood Publication, 1996).

²⁷⁰ The account of the feasts, *The Nativity of the Mother of God (8 September)*, *the Conception of Sainte Anna (9 December)* and *the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple*, are based on the *Protogospel of James*. Hieromonk Makarios of Simonos Petra, Christopher Hookway transl. *The Synaxarion: the Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church*, vol.1: September, October. Holy Convent of the Annunciation of Our Lady Ormylia (Chalkidike, 1998), p. 60 note 1.

after researching other fresco series depicting the life of the Virgin.²⁷¹ Beyond the question of the source, it is necessary to give a special focus to the theological meaning of these depictions in the *gropnita*. Not primarily decorative, the frescoes are designed to convey meaning to the faith community that gathers in the church.

Thus, in the second part of the dissertation, beginning at chapter five, I will compare the series of frescoes depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” with the *Protogospel of James* and the *Synaxarion* to establish the literary sources for the Moldavian iconographer. Chapter six will focus on the theology of the frescoes. A careful analysis of the narrative of the “Life of the Mother of God,” in the remarkable composition established by the Moldavian iconographer, reveals a profoundly sophisticated theological perspective. This Marian theology is embedded in the broad sweep of salvation history, and focuses on the coming into human history, i.e. the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Finally, a general conclusion will highlight the role of Prince Rares in the enrichment of the Marian iconography at the church of Humor monastery, and point to further studies in the area of the importance of an interdisciplinary dialogue between art and theology.

²⁷¹ David R. Cartlidge and J. Keith Elliot, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha* (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2001), pp. 29-32; Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, *op.cit.*, vol.1, pp. 61-201.

5. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN THE FRESCOES DEPICTING THE LIFE OF THE MOTHER OF GOD, THE PROGOSEL OF JAMES AND THE SYNAXARION

5.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the literary sources for the fresco series depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” in the *gropnita* of the church at Humor Monastery. However, before starting the analysis, I want to explain why I chose to study the *Protogospel of James* and the *Synaxarion* as possible literary sources for the frescoes.

The *Protogospel of James* is an apocryphal book (not canonical) describing the life of the Mother of God up to the birth of Christ. Art historians consider this book as the ultimate source for the images depicting her life, and the following analysis argues for its importance for the Moldavian church of Humor Monastery.²⁷² Yet, until recently, the traditional way of analyzing the icons among theologians has been to look at the canonical New Testament books and liturgical texts, rather than at the apocrypha, as possible written sources of inspiration for the icons. Traditionally, the *Synaxarion* itself has been given focal attention when dealing with depictions of the lives of saints.

Before beginning the analysis of the frescoes, I will present a short history of the apocryphal writings in general, and the *Protogospel of James* in particular, and its importance in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Then I will demonstrate how the *Synaxarion*, used both in liturgy and iconography, is the most inclusive compilation of the lives of saints in the Orthodox Church.

²⁷² David R. Cartlidge and J. Keith Elliot, *op.cit.*, pp. 29-32; Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, *op.cit.*, vol.1, pp. 61-201.

5.2. A General View on the New Testament Apocryphal Writings

The New Testament apocrypha is a substantial collection of works, written by early Christians, giving accounts of their spirituality and theology, or describing the lives of different biblical personages. Wilhelm Schneemelcher defined the apocrypha as those works that were unsuccessful, frequently heterodox, one-time candidates for inclusion in the canon of the Bible.²⁷³ In Schneemelcher's opinion, the apocryphal writings were not intended to supplant the Church's writings in respect of their authority, but simply to offer more details on the life of the Virgin Mary and other biblical personages for the early Christian communities.²⁷⁴

As Stephen Shoemaker observes, Schneemelcher narrowed the field of apocrypha to those books written in the first three Christian centuries, which had as their goal inclusion into the canon.²⁷⁵ In Shoemaker's view, one loses appreciation of the important role many later apocryphal texts had, that were written after the canon of the New Testament, which was firmly established in the fourth century. Shoemaker refers especially to the Marian apocrypha, that were written at the end of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth, and that were considered among the most influential extra-biblical teachings of the Christian faith. However, it is difficult to affirm whether these texts are strictly apocryphal or hagiographical, for there are debates that attempt to distinguish between the

²⁷³ Wilhelm Schneemelcher and R. McL. Wilson, eds., *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: J. Clarke, 1991), pp. 9-15.

²⁷⁴ *Idem.*, p. 51.

²⁷⁵ Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Between Scripture and Tradition: The Marian Apocrypha of Early Christianity in the Reception and Interpretation of the Bible in Late Antiquity," in *Proceedings of the Montreal Colloquium in Honour of Charles Kannengiesser, 11-13 October 2006*, edited by Lorenzo DiTommaso and Lucian Turcescu (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008), p. 493.

two categories of writings.²⁷⁶ For clarification on this issue, each text requires a careful contextual analysis. Church writers such as Irenaeus, Tertulian and Epiphanius wrote against some of the apocrypha, although, as Shoemaker observed, even Epiphanius cites the *Protogospel of James* when referring to traditions about Sts. Joachim and Anna, the Virgin Mary's parents.²⁷⁷

There are scholars who consider the apocryphal books as having the same theological value as the canonical books of the New Testament. For example in Bart Ehrman's opinion, the New Testament is only an ordinary collection of books sourced in the conflict between *proto-orthodoxy* and *heretodoxy* in early Christianity. Moreover, Ehrman does not use the term 'apocrypha' for the non-canonical writings, as the Orthodox Church and other scholars do, but names them 'lost scriptures'.²⁷⁸ Ehrman's understanding of what Christianity, heresy, and orthodoxy mean, is totally different from that of the Orthodox Church.

For the Orthodox Church, not all early Christian apocrypha were candidates for admission into the New Testament canon, as Schneemelcher states, neither were they rejected or considered as having the same value as the canonical books, as Ehrman holds. Some events narrated in the apocryphal books were accepted and found their place in the Orthodox Tradition. They often appear in icons and liturgical readings for different feast

²⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 495-496. Hagiography refers literally to writings on the subject of holy people, and specifically to their lives. The *Protogospel of James* presents the life of the Virgin Mary and is not considered a hagiography but an apocryphon.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 497.

²⁷⁸ In Ehrman's opinion, the apocryphal writings have the same, if not greater, value than the canonical books, but they were not included in the New Testament as a consequence of the decision of a so-called 'orthodoxy'. In his opinion, those who destroyed these 'sacred books' of ancient Christians ended by calling themselves 'orthodox' (Ehrman coined the phrase "proto-orthodox" to designate them). Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures. Books that did not Make it into the New Testament* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 7, and *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 9.

days. Shoemaker's evaluation of the apocrypha is closer to the Orthodox Tradition, but only for the Marian apocryphal literature. The issue of the Tradition is more complex than he presents it. In the following section, I will turn attention to the meaning of Tradition for the Orthodox Church.

5.3. Tradition, 'Traditions,' and Apocryphal Writings in the Orthodox Church²⁷⁹

In attempting to clarify the impact that apocryphal writings had on the iconography of the Orthodox Church, it is important to consider the distinction between Tradition and 'traditions' in relation to lived faith. Dumitru Staniloae elaborated a careful analysis of the role of Tradition in Orthodox communities. In Staniloae's view, "the living dialog of the Church with Christ is conducted principally through Scripture and Tradition at the same time."²⁸⁰ Tradition gives a permanent reality to this dialogue. The Church teaches that the content of Scripture, received by the faith handed down from the Apostles to the community of the Church, is inspired by the Holy Spirit. While the apostolic faith must be preserved unchanged, at the same time, the meaning of its texts must be deepened. Hence, Scripture requires a Tradition which represents another form of preserving and making use

²⁷⁹ For this section I used the main works on Tradition of the following contemporary Orthodox theologians: Dumitru Staniloae, Kallistos Ware, and Vladimir Lossky. I chose these three theologians because they are among the most reputed twenty century Orthodox theologians. Dumitru Staniloae (1903 – 1993) was a Romanian theologian and lived in a communist country. He was imprisoned for his religious conviction from 1958 until 1963. Fortunately, after he was freed, he received from the communist leaders the liberty to write his theological thoughts due to the international recognition he received as Theologian and Professor. Kallistos Ware was born in 1934 in Great Britain. At the age of 24 he converted to Orthodoxy. Today, he is the Metropolitan of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Great Britain. Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958) was a Russian theologian who, in 1922, together with his family, was exiled from Russia. His theological writings were produced in France, the country that adopted him.

²⁸⁰ Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology - the Experience of God*, transl. by Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer (Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), p. 40.

of revelation that has its fulfillment in Christ. “Tradition keeps the dynamism of the Scripture texts contemporary without changing it. It represents both an application and a continual deepening of the Scripture.”²⁸¹ Therefore, Tradition is the authoritative interpreter of Scripture. In essence, “the meaning of Tradition is the content of Scripture applied to human life, or made to pass over into the reality of human life through the Church.”²⁸²

Kallistos Ware, another contemporary Orthodox theologian, also emphasizes the complementary role of Tradition and Scripture. Tradition is the faith which Jesus Christ imparted to the Apostles. Ever since the time of the Apostles, Tradition has been handed down in the Church for generations.²⁸³ Concretely, Tradition includes the Creed, the decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, the writings of the Fathers, the canons, the service books, the icons - in fact the whole system of doctrine, Church government, worship, and art that Orthodoxy has articulated through the ages. The Orthodox Christian of today sees himself/herself, as heir and guardian of a great inheritance from the past, which has to be transmitted unimpaired to future Christians. “But”, Ware states, “the Orthodox Church is aware that not everything received from the past is of equal value.”²⁸⁴ Among the various elements of Tradition, a unique pre-eminence belongs to the Creed and to the doctrinal definitions of the Ecumenical Councils. These two aspects of Tradition the Orthodox accept as absolute and unchanging and that cannot be cancelled or revised. Other parts of Tradition do not have the same authority. Ware gives examples of different writings that entered the Tradition, but he does not mention the apocryphal writings that influenced not only the iconography but also Orthodox dogmatics and the establishment of different

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²⁸³ Kallistos Ware, “Holy Tradition: The Source of the Orthodox Faith,” in *The Orthodox Church: New Edition* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, UK Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 196.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

liturgical feasts. Moreover, Ware differentiates between ‘Tradition’ and ‘traditions.’ He says that many traditions from the past are human and accidental pious opinions (or worse) and are, thus, not a true part of the one Tradition, the essential Christian message.

According to Ware, “the Orthodox Church has to question the past, because throughout the ages it has not always been sufficiently critical in what was included in its Tradition.”²⁸⁵

Today, this uncritical attitude can no longer be tolerated. Higher standards of scholarship and increasing contact with western Christians have forced the Orthodox Church to distinguish more carefully between Tradition and traditions. The task of distinguishing is not easy. In Ware’s opinion, it is necessary to avoid “errors such as those made by the ‘Old Believers’ or the ‘Living Church’.”²⁸⁶ The first fell into an extreme conservatism, whereas the second yielded to modernism or theological liberalism which undermined the Tradition.²⁸⁷ Ware affirms that the Orthodox Church is today in a better position to avoid such errors, thanks to its contact with the Western world. Such contact helps to see more clearly what is essential in its inheritance.²⁸⁸

Vladimir Lossky’s opinion on Tradition is very close to that of Ware. He defines it in this way:

The life of the Holy Spirit in the Church, communicating to each member of the Body of Christ the faculty of hearing, of receiving, of knowing the Truth in the Light which belongs to it, and not according to the light of human reason.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ Ware, “Holy Tradition: The Source of the Orthodox Faith,” p. 197.

²⁸⁶ Ware refers here to the Russian Old Believers who separated themselves from the official Russian Orthodox Church in the middle of the seventeenth century as a protest against the liturgical revisions which Patriarch Nikon introduced into the Church. The aim of these revisions was the uniformity between Russian and Greek Orthodox practices. The Living Church was a schism in the Russian Orthodox Church in the years 1922–1946. The Living Church insisted that the Church has to adapt itself to the realities of the Communist regime and to make significant changes in its own canonical and liturgical tradition.

²⁸⁷ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, pp. 197-198.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

²⁸⁹ Leonide Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, “Tradition and traditions,” in *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), p. 15.

Lossky's formulation, "and not according to the light of human reason," is not the last word of Orthodox theology. It would be more proper to say, 'and not according to the light of human reason ALONE.' Orthodox theology is not anti-rational, even if it is, appropriately, anti-rationalistic.

Lossky emphasizes the role of Tradition in the life of the Church. Thus, he gives the example of the canon of the writings that were to become the New Testament, how it was formed with some hesitations and after the writings were critically analyzed.²⁹⁰ Tradition not only has oral traditions received from the Apostles, but also teachings from the Church Fathers and from apocryphal sources. The Church examined the apocrypha and drew up boundaries between true and false traditions that were crystallized together in these writings. In Lossky's opinion, Tradition exercised "its critical action by not accepting all the writings circulating under names of the Apostles or other saints (that is to say apocrypha)."²⁹¹ At the same time, Tradition gave careful discernment to pertinent elements of the 'traditions' for completing or illustrating events in which the Scriptures are silent, but that are recognized as true.

Although Lossky mentioned the apocryphal writings that entered Tradition, he did not clarify their limits and their utilization in Orthodoxy. The attitude toward the apocryphal writings in Orthodoxy is not very clear. Lucian Turcescu states that "Orthodox theology should explain more clearly the meaning and limits of the utilization of apocryphal literature

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

(in devotions, icons, etc), and it has not done it so far.”²⁹² Scholars like Turcescu and Ware notice that Orthodoxy has not done a good job in clarifying the distinction between Tradition and ‘traditions.’

An example of the influence of the apocrypha in the Orthodox Church is the *Protogospel of James*, which influenced iconography to a greater degree than other apocryphal writings. There are icons depicting canonical books alongside the *Protogospel* (see the *Annunciation* or the *Nativity of Christ*) and festal icons depicting stories initially narrated in the *Protogospel* and later included in the *Synaxarion* (see the *Nativity of the Mother of God* or the *Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple*).²⁹³ Because of the major role which the *Protogospel* had for the Orthodox Tradition in general and for iconography in particular, it is necessary to present a brief history of this exceptional text.

5.4. Short History of the *Protogospel of James*

Around the year 1550, Guillaume Postel (1510-1581), a French religious universalist, journeyed to the East. In the churches that he visited, he heard a narrative of the birth of Mary. Because the book containing that narrative was so highly respected, he believed it was canonical for the Eastern Church.²⁹⁴ Postel acquired a manuscript of the document and gave to it the name it has even today: the *Protevangelium* (or *Protogospel*) –

²⁹² Lucian Turcescu, “Devotion versus Theology? Some Mariological Issues. An Orthodox Response to Fr. Jelly’s ‘Congar’s Anthropology and His Doctrine of Salvation,’” unpublished paper delivered at the “Yves Congar Ecumenical Colloquium,” Annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Ottawa, ON, June 12-14, 1998.

²⁹³ The *Protogospel* influenced not only the iconography of the *Nativity of the Mother of God* or the *Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple*, but also the liturgical texts of the two feast days. See: the *Synaxarion* for 8 September and 21 November and *The Festal Menaion*, translated from Greek by Mother Mary and Kallistos Ware (South Canaan, PA, 1998), pp. 47 and 51.

²⁹⁴ François Bovon, Pierre Geoltrain and Jean-Daniel Kaestli, *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 73.

“the first gospel.” Upon returning to France, he was accused of having produced a manuscript that was a forgery. Later investigation showed that, far from being a sixteenth-century forgery, the *Protogospel* was indeed a product of the early Church and widely used in its liturgy.²⁹⁵

The *Protogospel* played an important role in both East and West, although it was never regarded as canonical. Its writing is often explained as due to the need to “fill in the gap” left in the canonical gospels concerning the life of the Mother of God.²⁹⁶ It was very popular in the Eastern Churches, confirmed by the survival of around one hundred and forty Greek manuscripts and numerous translations into oriental languages.²⁹⁷ The *Protogospel* was highly valued by the Fathers of the Early Church because of their deep veneration for the Mother of God and the ideal of virginity.²⁹⁸ No wonder that the influence of this book was not limited to a dogmatic level, but it also influenced the realm of art because it includes many more details than the canonical gospels concerning the life of the Mother of God. As a consequence of its wide acceptance and appreciation, the *Protogospel* was used in iconography alongside the canonical writings.

According to scholarly consensus, the *Protogospel* originated in the second century. A *Book of James* was referred to by the ancient Church writers. The first certain allusion to the document was in the third century, mentioned by Origen in his commentary on Matthew 10:17:

Some say, basing it on a tradition in the Gospel according to Peter, as it is entitled, or ‘The Book of James,’ that the brethren of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a former

²⁹⁵ Boyd L. Daniels, *The Greek Manuscript Tradition of the Protevangelium Jacobi*, s.l.: s.n., 1956 (microfilm), p. 3.

²⁹⁶ David R. Cartlidge and J. Keith Elliot, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha* (London, UK.: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2001), p. 23.

²⁹⁷ Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1, p. 421.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 425.

wife, whom he married before Mary. Now those who say so wish to preserve the honor of Mary in virginity to the end, so that that body of hers which was appointed to minister to the Word which said, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee," might not know intercourse with a man after that the Holy Ghost came into her and the power from on high overshadowed her. And I think it is in harmony with reason that Jesus was the first-fruit among men of the purity, which consists in chastity, and Mary among women; for it were not pious to ascribe to any other than to her the first-fruit of virginity.²⁹⁹

The story of the midwives being present at the Nativity of Christ, described in the *Protogospel of James*, was also mentioned by Clement of Alexandria.³⁰⁰ The testimonies of Origen and Clement motivated scholars to date the book to around the year 150, stating that several chapters were added later.³⁰¹ Some scholars believe that the *Protogospel* is the work of several hands. Edgar Hennecke states that we first have the text narrated in the third person then suddenly Joseph speaks in the first person (18:2). Consequently, this passage was certainly inserted in the narrative since it is lacking in the oldest manuscripts. Later manuscripts include a prayer of Salome (one of the midwives who was present at the Nativity of Christ) which is lacking in the oldest manuscripts.

In Ron Cameron's opinion, three different sources influenced the *Protogospel of James*: extracanonical traditions, the Old Testament, and the Gospels of Sts. Matthew and Luke.³⁰² For example, the birth of Christ in a cave is an extracanonical tradition known to St. Justin the Martyr; the lamentation of St. Anna is reminiscent of the Septuagint;

²⁹⁹ Allan Menzies ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to a.d. 325*; vol. 10, Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 10, 17.

³⁰⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromates*, book VII, ch. XVI, in Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers (Fathers of the Second Century)*, vol. 2 available online: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02>. (accessed in June 2009). For a list of Church Fathers mentioning the *Protogospel of James* in their writings, see: Emile de Strycker s.j., *La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques ; recherches sur le papyrus Bodmer 5 avec une édition critique du texte grec et une traduction annotée. En Appendice, les versions arméniennes traduites en latin par Hans Quecke, s.j.* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), p. 412.

³⁰¹ Schneemelcher and Wilson, eds., *op.cit.*, p. 423.

³⁰² Ron Cameron, ed., *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts* (Philadelphia, PA: the Westminster Press, 1982), pp. 107-121.

moreover, passages from the canonical gospels of Sts. Mathew and Luke are frequently harmonized into a single story in the *Protogospel*.³⁰³ Schneemelcher argues that the author of the *Protogospel* attempted to harmonize discrepancies between the earlier materials of varying provenance, which he utilized to obtain the *Protogospel*.³⁰⁴

Like all the apocryphal books, the actual author of the *Protogospel* is unknown, although the work is ascribed to St. James, the “brother” of the Lord, who according to the text was St. Joseph’s son from a former marriage.³⁰⁵ James claims to have written the book after the death of Herod (the Great or Agrippa?). The Greek Fathers speak of a “certain James,” and the Decree of Gelasius (around 550 A.D.) condemns it but attributes the work to James the Younger.³⁰⁶

The book is given various titles by different scholars. For example, Tischendorf titled it *The Birth of Mary the Holy Mother of God, and Very Glorious Mother of Jesus Christ* from a manuscript of the eleventh century, and this because the text is devoted to the life of the Virgin Mary. However, the most popular title is the *Protogospel (Protoevangelion) of James*, since its narrative precedes the events found in the canonical Gospels.³⁰⁷

The vast majority of Greek manuscripts of the *Protogospel* are from the 10th century or later.³⁰⁸ Some of the manuscripts are mere fragments and differ radically from

³⁰³ Schneemelcher and Wilson, eds., *op.cit.*, pp. 424-425.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

³⁰⁷ Cartlidge and Elliot, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

³⁰⁸ Tischendorf, in 1876, counted about fifty Greek manuscripts of the *Protogospel of James* around the world. Eighty years later, Daniels, in his book *The Greek manuscript tradition of the Protoevangelium Jacobi*, after he consulted during three years of studies every catalog of Greek manuscripts he could obtain, made a list of one hundred thirty-eight manuscripts that contain the *Protogospel*. He could not include in his work all the manuscripts at Mont Athos, but only several that were microfilmed by Professor Ernest W. Saunders, who was engaged in a research work on Mount Athos in 1953.

each other in details. The earliest manuscript of the *Protogospel* was discovered in 1958 by Michael Testuz. It is housed in Geneva's Bodmer Library and is known as the Papyrus Bodmer 5. It dates from the third century.³⁰⁹ In 1961, Emile de Strycker, who published Testuz' research and corrected the errors in his edition, provided us with one of the best critical editions of the *Protogospel*.³¹⁰

Beside the Greek manuscripts of the *Protogospel of James*, Schneemelcher lists a number of ancient versions in different languages that were preserved in manuscripts from the fifth to the sixteenth century. The languages are Syriac, Latin, Georgian, Armenian, Arabic, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Slavonic.³¹¹

In the Library of the Romanian Academy there is a Slavonic variant of the *Protogospel*, Manuscript no. 357, dated 1789.³¹² There is also a Greek manuscript of the *Protogospel* dated 1399, in miscellaneous no. 377/595, probably written in an Athonite monastery (Greece), and later brought to Romania.³¹³ Now, the Slavonic manuscript no. 357 was surely not the literary source used by the iconographer for our Humor frescoes, because it is dated more than two hundred years after these were painted. Yet, the iconographer might have known the Greek manuscript of the *Protogospel* (misc.377/595). Unfortunately, we do not know the exact year in which the manuscript entered Romania to definitely hold to this hypothesis. Moreover, a preliminary survey of the text of the misc. 375/595 has not given significant results, such as unique details present only in this version of the *Protogospel of James* and Humor's frescoes.

³⁰⁹ Schneemelcher and Wilson, eds., *op.cit.*, p. 421.

³¹⁰ de Strycker, *op. cit.*

³¹¹ Schneemelcher and Wilson, eds., *op.cit.*, pp. 421-422.

³¹² Ioan Radu Mircea, *Répertoire des manuscrits slaves en Roumanie : auteurs byzantins et slaves* (Sofia : Institut d'études balkaniques, 2005), p.81.

³¹³ Constantin Litzica, *Catalogul Manuscriselor Grecesti (The Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts)* (Bucharest, Romania: Editiunea Academiei Romane, 1909), p. 275.

The same ambiguities exist for the *Synaxarion* which appears to be a second literary source for the iconographer in depicting the “Life of the Mother of God”. We do not know the exact variant of the *Synaxarion* that circulated in sixteenth-century Moldavian monasteries. What we do know is that the Moldavian iconographers had a deep knowledge of the lives of saints since they are depicted in detail in the narthex of the majority of sixteenth-century Moldavian churches. In the following section, I will provide a short history of the *Synaxarion* used extensively in Orthodox iconography.

5.5. A Short History of the Synaxarion

The *Synaxarion* (pl. *Synaxaria*) is a compilation of hagiographies (lives of saints) arranged in the order of each saint’s feast day, starting with September 1st and ending with August 31st. The *Synaxaria* we have today represent the culmination of a long process within Greek hagiography, namely the centralization and upgrading of hagiographical texts. In the Prologue to *The Great Synaxaris of the Orthodox Church*, 1970, Abbot Viktor Matthaios gives a brief account of the history of *Synaxaria* from the early centuries to his own time.³¹⁴ He states that writing and treasuring the lives of the saints was an old Church tradition, and he composed a long list of hagiographers starting with those of the fourth century. These include: Dorotheos of Tyre (†362), who wrote the *Memoranda on the Holy Apostles, on the Prophets and on the Saints* and St. Athanasius the Great (†373), who wrote the *Life of Saint Antony*.

³¹⁴ “Prologue,” in *The Great Synaxaris of the Orthodox Church*, by Abbot Viktor Matthaios of the Sacred Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Saviour in Kroniza of Koubaras in Attica, (3rd edition), 12 vols. (Athens, Greece: 1970).

More Christian hagiographies were written by the Cappadocian Fathers and other Fathers of the Church, the most important among them being St. Basil the Great (†379), who wrote the *Lives of the Martyrs Gordios and Mamas*, and St. Gregory of Nyssa (†386), who wrote the martyrdoms of *St. Mamas the Martyr*, *St Theodore of Tyre the Great-Martyr*, *St. Theodore Tiron and the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste*. For the fifth-century, the preeminent hagiographer was St. John Chrysostom (†407), who wrote the martyrdom of *St. Babyla the Martyr*. Matthaios also mentions the early Church historians as valuable sources of hagiographies: Eusebius (†339), Socrates (5th century), Theodoret (†458), and Hermeias Sozomenos (†450).³¹⁵ Matthaios goes on to mention those early authors who wrote hagiological texts on groups of saints: Theodoret's *Philotheos Historia*, St. Gregory Dialogos' *Tetrabiblos*, Herakleides of Capadocia's *Lausiakon*, Palladios of Helenoupolis' *Paradise of the Fathers*, and John Moschos' *Neon Leimonarion*.

However, the most prolific Greek hagiographers lived during the Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods. Symeon Metaphrastes (10th century) was the most renowned of the Byzantine hagiographers and the first to collect and edit one hundred and forty eight saints' lives.³¹⁶ Emperor Basil II (975 - 1025), following the example of Symeon, commissioned the composition of what is called the *Menologium of Basil II* or the *Basileian Synaxarion*. The *Menologium of Basil II* is considered the most important work of art of Greek manuscripts with miniatures that have survived to the present day. Today, the document is part of the collection of Greek manuscripts of the Vatican Library, under reference number

³¹⁵ *Idem*.

³¹⁶ Christian Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting and Canonization* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002), p. 62.

Vat. Gr. 1613.³¹⁷ The first volume, the only one that survived, corresponds to the first half of the liturgical year, from September to February.

The most important author of *Synaxaria*, after Symeon Metaphrastes, was Hierodeacon Maurikios. He composed *The Synaxaristes ton Dodeka Menon tou Eniautou*, in which he incorporated the daily life of saints collected in Metaphrastes' *Synaxarion* and in the *Menologium of Basil II*, alongside everything that had been written on the lives of saints after the previous *Synaxaria* were compiled, up until his time.³¹⁸

Nikodemos the Hagiorite, from Naxos (1749-1809), was the next one to make a great contribution to the *Synaxaria*.³¹⁹ He had a special love for hagiography, as is attested to by his works: *Neo Martyrologion* (Venice 1799), which comprises the lives of neomartyrs who died in Greece during the Ottoman occupation between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, and the *New Eklogion* (Venice 1803), which contains beautiful lives of saints. Later, at the request of Patriarch Gregory V, he added the memoirs of a number of saints to the *Synaxaristes* of Maurikios, published posthumously under the title *New Synaxarion of Hosios Nikodemos* 1819.

³¹⁷ *Photographic Reproduction of the Menologium of Basil II (Vatican Library, Manuscript, Gr. 1613), 975-1025 A.D* (Citta del vaticano : Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, Archivio fotografico, [1970-1979?]). In 2011, I had the opportunity to consult a copy of this superb manuscript thanks to help from the staff of the library of *Lettres et sciences humaines*, University of Montreal. They asked for the copy of the manuscript which the *Vatican Library* has, and *Vatican Library* sent it to Montreal. There are very few copies of this manuscript. I am aware of the existence of only two copies, one at the *Vatican Library* and the other at the department of rare and precious books, at the Library of Harvard University. I have translated the texts of the Marian feasts from the *Menologium of Basil II*, compiled in the eleventh century, and I compared them with those in the *Synaxarion* compiled in the twentieth century by Hieromonk Makarios of Simonos Petra, Mount Athos, and translated into English in 1998 - this latter version I have used it in my dissertation. It is remarkable the care for the preservation of the original ancient accounts within the modern version of the *Synaxarion*. However, in the modern *Synaxarion* there are long theologies related to the life of saints celebrated in each liturgical day, but they do not affect the comparative study I have done between of the *Synaxarion*, *Protogospel* and the frescoes (see ch.5: 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9).

³¹⁸ Cf. George Dion Dragas, *Ecclesiasticus II: Orthodox Icons, Saints, Feasts and Prayer* (Rollinsford, NH, Orthodox Research Institute, 2005), pp. 103-105.

³¹⁹ I took the information on Nikodemos' contribution to *Synaxaria* from the *Prologue* of Abbot Viktor Matthaïos, *Great Synaxaris of the Orthodox Church*.

The *Synaxarion* that I used for my dissertation is based on the *Menologium of Basil II* and on the works of Nikodemos, enlarged with additional sources and historical studies by Hieromonk Makarios of Simonos Petra in Mount Athos. This *Synaxarion* includes the lives of saints venerated by the different Orthodox Churches in Russia, Romania, Georgia, Serbia, and Bulgaria, many of whom were canonized after the collapse of the communist regimes, as well as many Western saints from the period of the undivided Church.³²⁰ We do not know which *Synaxarion* was in circulation in sixteenth century Moldavia, but what we do know is that this edition of the *Synaxarion* constitutes the most extensive collection of saints' lives of the Orthodox Church, having the same roots as the oldest *Synaxaria*.³²¹

Before the proper analysis of the influence which the *Synaxarion* and the *Protogospel of James* had on the frescoes depicting the “Life of the Mother of God,” I will refer to the location of the frescoes in the church’s *gropnita*.

5.6. Graphical Representation of the Series of Frescoes Depicting the *Life of the Mother of God* in the Church’s *Gropnita* of the Humor Monastery

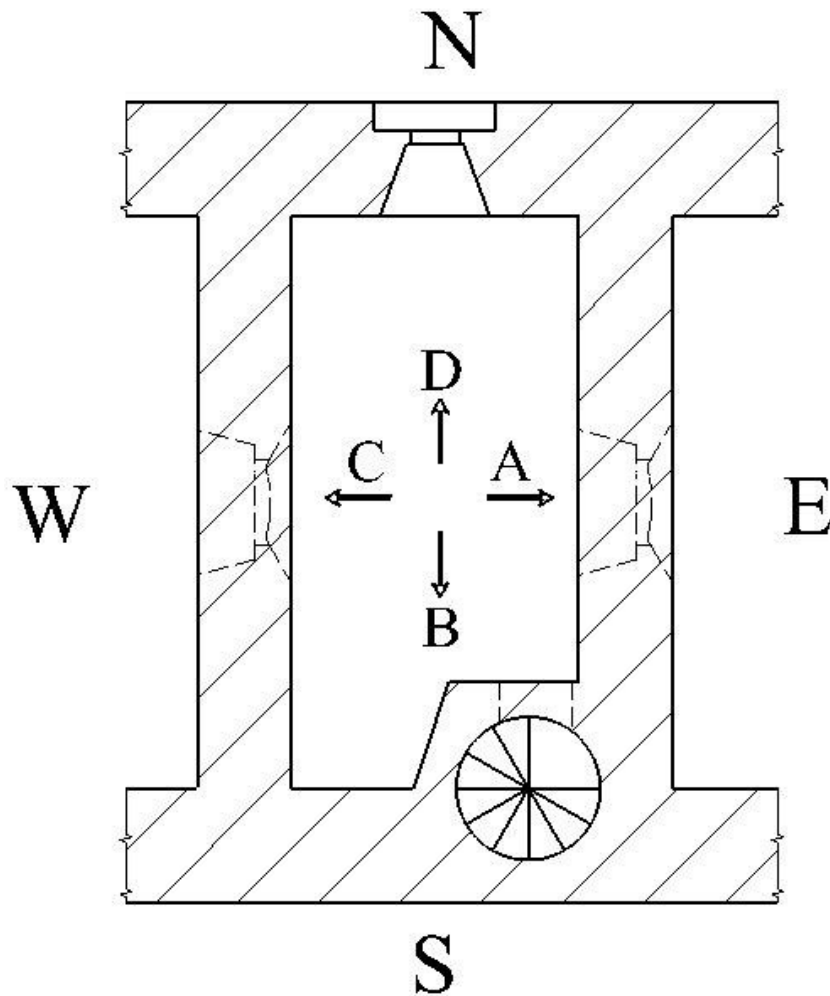
The frescoes depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” are situated on the *gropnita*’s vault and are divided into two sections, each section being composed of two rows. In the Orthodox Church the canon of painting and the consequent reading of the frescoes starts with the frescoes on the eastern wall, continuing with those on the southern wall, then the western wall, and finally those depicted on the northern wall.³²² Thus, I will

³²⁰ Hieromonk Makarios of Simonos Petra, “Introduction” in *The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church*, vol. 1: September, October (Holy Convent of the Annunciation of Our Lady Ormylia Chalkidike, 1998).

³²¹ *Ibid.*

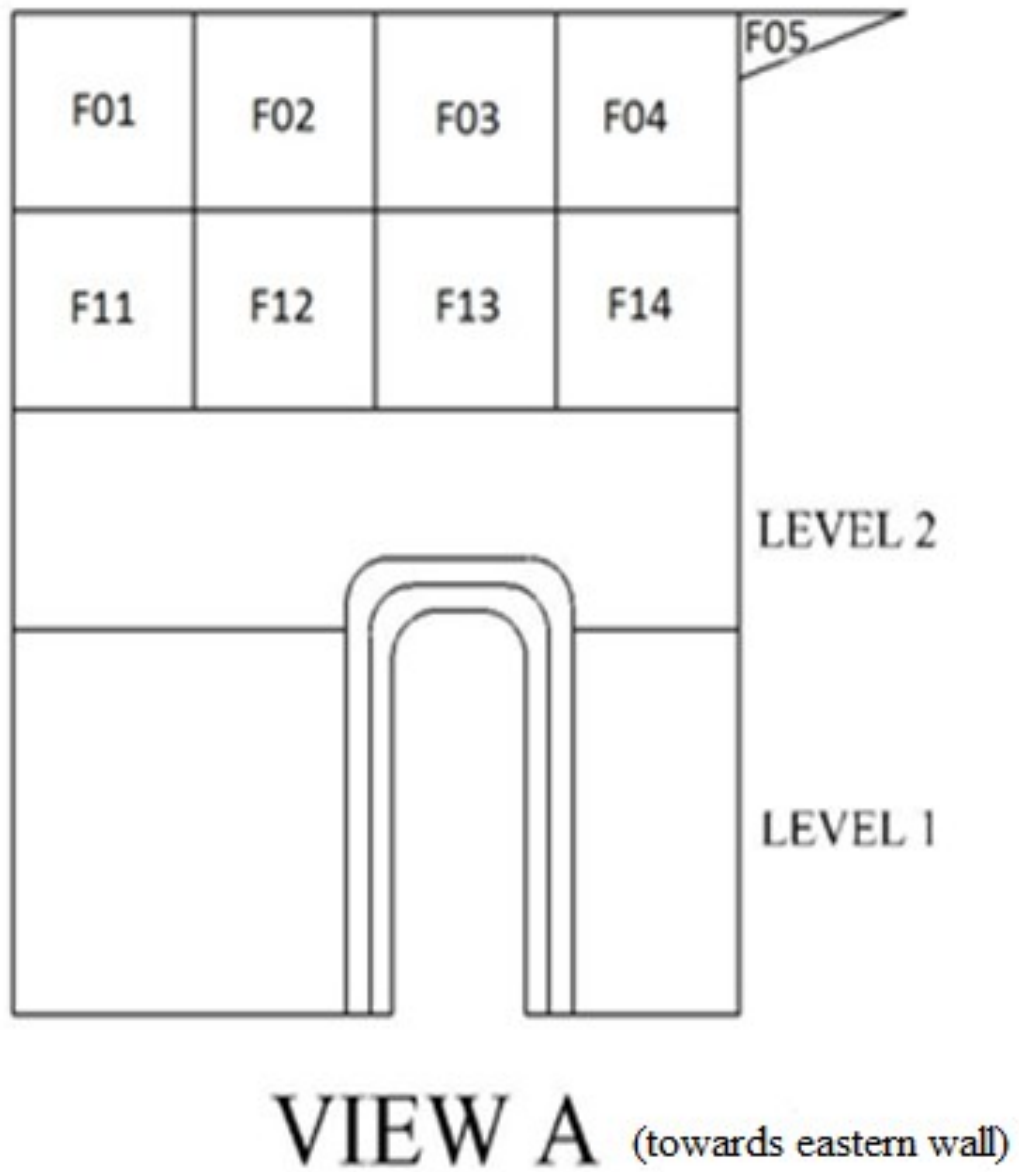
³²² *The Painter's Manual*, pp. 84-86 (498 (458), 507 (467)).

number the frescoes of the first row starting with the upper left fresco on the eastern wall and continue the numbering towards the northern wall, and then I will do the same for the second row, according to the graphical representation presented below.

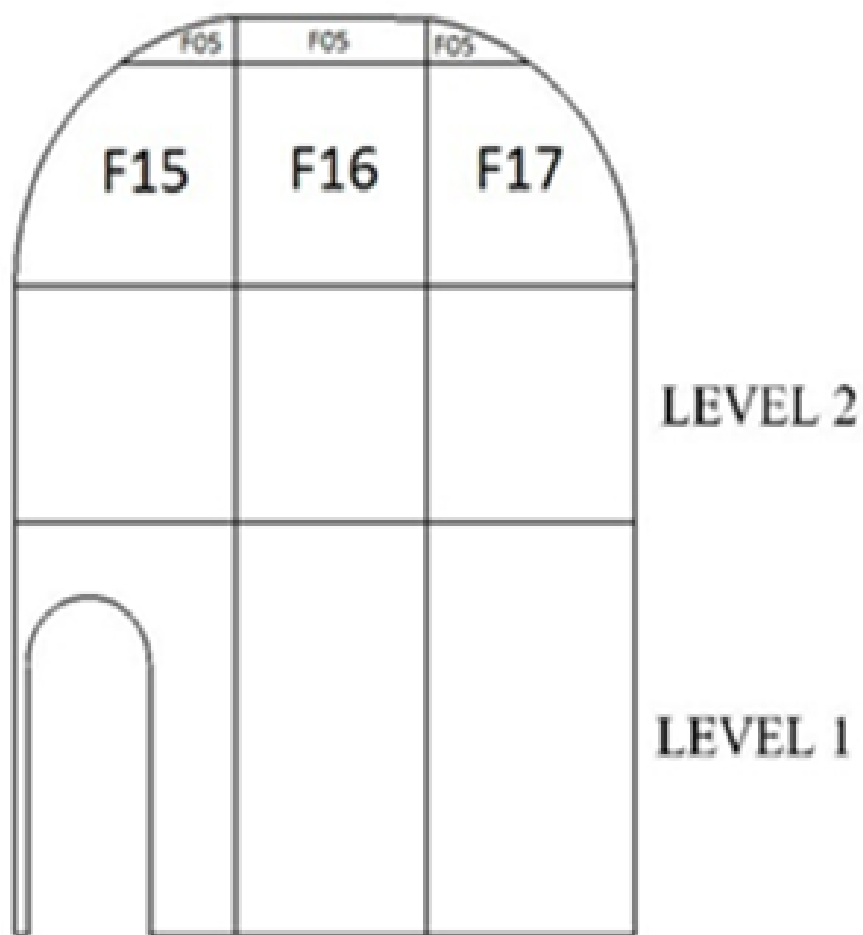


SECTION
LOOKING DOWN

Picture 38: The Gropnita - Graphical Representation - Section Looking Down

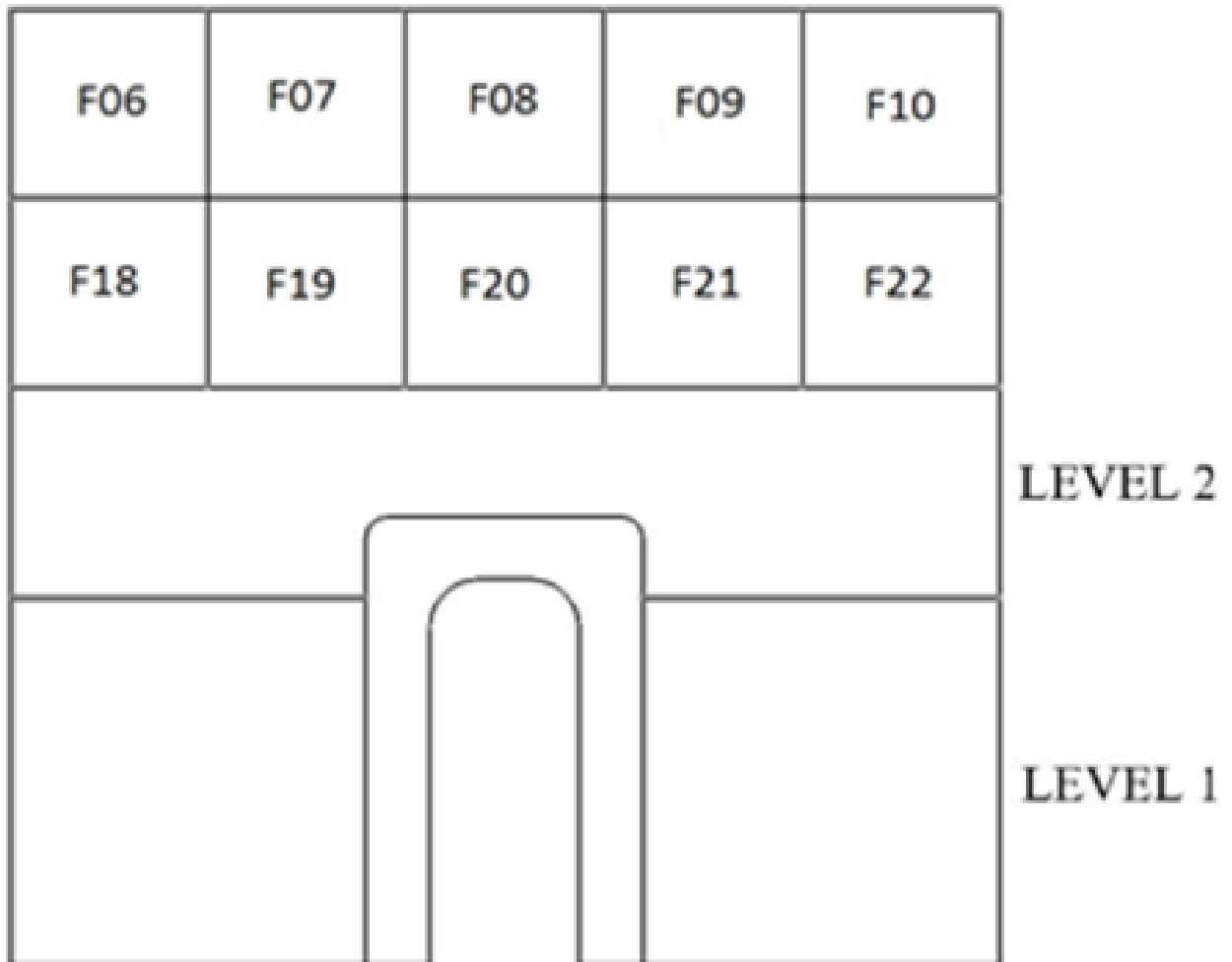


Picture 39: The Gropnita - Graphical Representation - View A



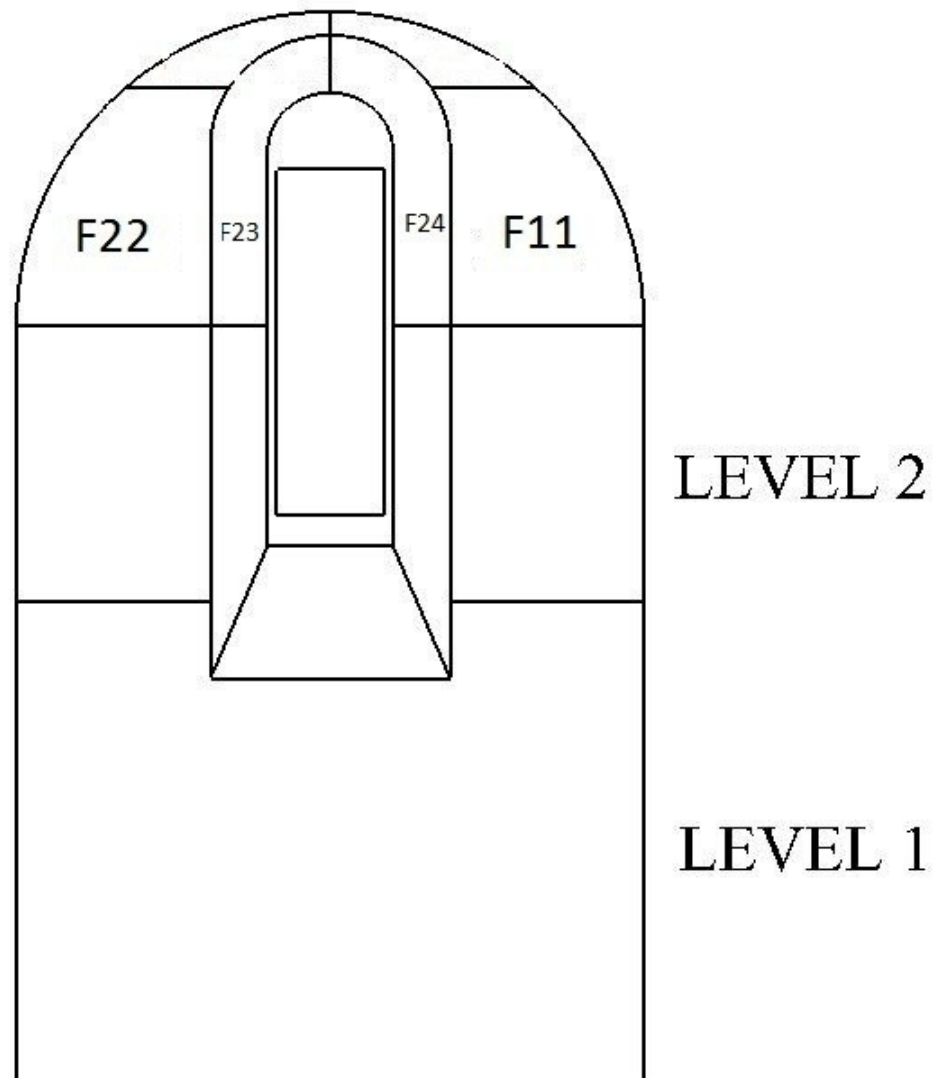
VIEW B (towards southern wall)

Picture 40: The Gropnita - Graphical Representation – View B



VIEW C (towards western wall)

Picture 41: The Gropnita - Graphical Representation – View C



VIEW D (towards northern wall)

Picture 42: The Gropnita - Graphical Representation – View D

The first diagram, the floor plan (section looking down), is a view from above showing the arrangement of spaces in the *gropnita* in the same way as a map. Technically, it is a horizontal section cut through the *gropnita* one meter above floor level that shows its four

walls, the window, three door openings and the staircase which leads from the *gropnita* to the treasure chamber. On the floor plan are placed four views: view A (towards the eastern wall), view B (towards the southern wall), view C (towards the western wall) and view D (towards the northern wall). On the four views are numbered two levels (Level 1 and Level 2), containing frescos depicting female saints (Level 1) and scenes with Archangel Michael (Level 2) presented in chapter 4. The frescoes numbered (F1, F2, etc.) compose the “Life of the Mother of God”.³²³ The row containing the frescoes F11-F14 is placed on the eastern wall, and the row containing the frescoes F18-F22 is placed on the western wall. In the meantime the row of the frescoes F01-F05 is placed on the eastern side of the ceiling, but in view A it is projected on the plan of the eastern wall for clarity. Finally, the row of the frescoes F06-F10 is placed on the western side of the ceiling, but in view C it is projected on the plan of the western wall for clarity.

In order to determine what was transposed from the apocryphal narratives in the frescoes, I will use Lepakhin’s methodology. Lapakihin holds that iconographers select certain elements from texts and then transpose them onto frescoes. To establish what the Moldavian iconographer transposed from the *Protogospel* and/or the *Synaxarion* onto the frescoes, I will compose a chart with three columns: the first for the frescoes, the second for sequences from the *Protogospel*, and the third for sequences from the *Synaxarion* related to the frescoes. First, I will compare the three corpuses examining the order of sequences of each painted and written story, and then, I will analyze their content. This double analysis will help to determine what exactly has been transposed from the narratives onto the frescoes.

³²³ The pictures of the fresco series depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” are annexed at the end of the dissertation.

The *Protogospel* is divided into twenty five chapters, and each chapter contains a different number of verses. The *Synaxarion* is divided into liturgical days, starting with September 1st and ending with August 31st. In each day is recounted the life of the saint(s) celebrated on that particular day. The narration of the liturgical day has neither chapters nor verses, as we find in the *Portogospel of James*. Thus, in the *Protogospel* it is easier to see the order of the events narrated, in contrast with the *Synaxarion*. In order to visualize more easily the order of the narrative sequences in the *Synaxarion*, I will number the sentences of the liturgical days related to the frescoes. The texts of the *Synaxarion* with their numbered sentences are annexed at the end of this dissertation.

5.7. Comparative Chart between the Order of the Frescoes and their Corresponding Written Sequences in the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion*

Frescoes (F)	<i>Protogospel of James (PJ)</i> ³²⁴	<i>Synaxarion (S)</i> ³²⁵
F1 The Tabernacle of the Old Testament of the Jews	-	-
F2 Joachim Gives His Gifts to the Temple	PJ 1: 2	S 8 September 10-12
F3 The Angel of the Lord Appeared to Joachim in a Desert	PJ 1:4 and 4:2	S 8 September 13-14, 18
F4 Anna Prays in a (Cell?) Garden	PJ 2:4 - 4:3	S 8 September 14-18 and S 9 December 3
F5 Joachim and Anna Praying at a Distance from Each Other	PJ 1:4 - 4:3	S 8 Spetember13-18 and S 9 December 3
F6 The Kiss of Joachim and Anna	PJ 4: 4	-
F7 The Nativity of the Mother of God	PJ 5:2	S 8 September 19-22

³²⁴ I use the *Protogospel of James* translated by Wilhelm Schneemelcher and R. McL. Wilson, eds., *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. I. (Cambridge, UK: J. Clarke, 1991), pp. 426-436.

³²⁵ I use the *Synaxarion* compiled by Hieromonk Makarios of Simonos Petra, Christopher Hookway transl. *The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church*, 5vols. (Ormylia, Chalkidike: Holy Convent of the Annunciation of Our Lady 1998).

F8 Anna Gives the Mother of God to Joachim	-	S 9 September 1
F9 The Blessing of the Priests	PJ 6:2	S 8 September 27-31
F10 The Coming of the Mother of God to Her Mother Anna	PJ 6:1	S 8 September 23-26
F11 The Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple	PJ 7:2-8:1	S 21 November 3-15
F12 The Annunciation	PJ 11:1-3	S 25 March 11-21
F13 Joseph Questioning Mary	PJ 13:1 -14:1	S 26 December 34-36
F14 A Test about Christ's Incarnation	PJ 15:1-16:2	-
F15 The Enrolment in the Census of the Mother of God	PJ 17:1	S 25 December 1-4
F16 Joseph Comes to the Mother of God	PJ 8:2-9:3	S 21 November 21-28 and S 26 December 33
F17 The Visitation	PJ 12:2	S 24 June 1-4
F18 The Nativity of Christ	PJ 17:3-20:3	S 25 December 1-56
F19 The Synaxis of the Mother of God	-	S 26 December 1-15
F20 The Flight into Egypt	-	S 26 December 16-27
F21 The Return from Egypt	-	S 26 December 28-30
F22 The Anapeson	-	-
F23 The Prayer of the Mother of God on the Mount of Olives	-	-
F24 Joachim Gave a Sacrifice to the Temple	PJ 5:1	-

Picture 43: Comparative Chart - the Frescoes the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion*

The first fresco (F1) of the series depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” shows an Old Testament High-Priest in prayer. The fresco does not have a textual correspondence in the *Protogospel* or in the *Synaxarion* but constitutes a prologue to the “Life of the

Mother of God". The *Protogospel* (1:1) and the *Synaxarion* 8 September 1-10 have their prefaces, but the iconographer apparently decided to depict neither of these. Instead, he created an original prologue for the fresco series emphasising the importance of prayer offered by a pure heart.

The second fresco (F2) depicts the story of the gifts of Sts. Joachim and Anna that were refused at the Temple because they did not have children, often a sign, in the Old Testament, of divine displeasure. The *Protogospel* 1: 2 narrates that Reuben, priest at the Temple, denied Joachim access to participation in the Israelites' offerings because of his childlessness. The same story is recounted in the *Synaxarion* 8 September 10-12.

The fresco series continues with the depiction of Joachim in the desert (F3). The *Protogospel* 1:4 relates how Reuben's refusal caused Joachim great grief. Joachim decided to withdraw into the desert for forty days of fasting, hoping to receive from God the gift of fatherhood. The *Synaxarion* 8 September 13 also narrates that Reuben's words and refusal hurt Joachim. Hence, instead of returning home, he went up into a mountain alone to pray and weep. The iconographer exercised his liberty in choosing which passages from the texts to depict. Thus, in addition to the texts already mentioned, he chose to incorporate here a detail narrated only later in the *Protogospel* 4:2. This text recounts how two messengers visited Joachim in the mountain. This is not, strictly speaking, a break in the sequence of events in the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion*.³²⁶

The next fresco (F4) illustrates Anna's prayer, the textual correspondence for which is the *Protogospel* 2:4-4:3 and the *Synaxarion* 8 September 14-18. In the fresco, Anna prays in a garden. The *Protogospel* 2:4 mentions this detail, but not the *Synaxarion*. The garden, Anna's place of prayer, is mentioned only later in *Synaxarion* 9 December 3,

³²⁶ Here I consider only the sequence of events; I will later compare the respective contents of each scene.

the celebration day for the *Conception by Saint Anna of the Most Holy Mother of God*. We assume that, here, the iconographer follows the *Protogospel*.

The iconographer chose not to represent the humiliation of Anna by her servant, who ridiculed her infertility (*Protogospel* 2, 1-3), even though it is a theme depicted in similar fresco series.³²⁷ The *Synaxarion* made the same omission. Again, the Moldavian iconographer exercised his liberty in choosing from the texts the sequences to be depicted, excluding others.

In fresco five (F5), he depicted the prayers of Joachim and Anna in a totally different manner from that of previous frescoes of their prayers. Fresco five recapitulates narrations *Protogospel* 1:4 - 4:3 and *Synaxarion* 8 September 13-18 and 9 December 3, emphasizing the importance and power of prayers.

The next fresco (F6) illustrates the kiss (embrace) of Joachim and Anna when they meet again. The fresco depicts *Protogospel* 4:4 since that scene is not narrated in the *Synaxarion*. The sequence of the *Protogospel* is followed.

Following the embrace of Joachim and Anna, fresco seven (F7) illustrates the *Nativity of the Mother of God* narrated in both the *Protogospel* 5:2 and the *Synaxarion* 8 September 19-22. The *Synaxarion* narrates the birth of Mary immediately after Joachim's return home. In contrast with the *Synaxarion*, the *Protogospel* mentions first Joachim's doubts concerning his fatherhood (*Protogospel* 4:5-5:1). Although he received the promise of his future fatherhood from the "mouth of an angel," Joachim wanted to verify the truthfulness of the news. Departing from the sequence of the *Protogospel*, the iconographer transferred the scene of Joachim's doubt to the end of the fresco series (F24).

³²⁷ For the order of the frescoes depicting the Life of the Mother of God, see Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'Empire byzantin et en Occident*, vol. 1 (Bruxelles: Palais des Académies, 1964-1965), pp. 68-72.

The next fresco (F8) portrays Anna giving Mary to Joachim, an event not explicitly narrated in either the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion*. The fresco might nevertheless be related to the *Synaxarion* 9 September, the day of celebration of the *Synaxis of Joachim and Anna*. A *Synaxis* honours the saint (or saints, or angels) who participated in the event of a major feast. Thus, after a major feast (in this case the *Nativity of the Mother of God*), the persons who are associated with that feast are celebrated, in this case, precisely, Sts. Joachim and Anna. If this fresco is a transposition of the *Synaxis of Joachim and Anna*, the depiction in the *gropnita* is original. The traditional depiction of the *Synaxis of Joachim and Anna* is very different from that in the *gropnita* (see below for the analysis of the content of the written narration and the fresco of *Anna giving Mary to Joachim*).

The following fresco (F9) illustrates the blessing which the Virgin Mary received from the priests at the age of one, an event that is narrated in both the *Protogospel* 6:2 and the *Synaxarion* 8 September 27-31. Both texts describe how, at the age of six months, Mary walked for the first time (*Protogospel*: 6:1 and *Synaxarion* 8 September 23-26), and they continue with the story of the blessings which Mary received from the priests at the age of one (*Protogospel* 6:2 and *Synaxarion* 8 September 27-31). The iconographer reversed the two events, and first depicted the blessings which Mary received (F9) and then her first steps (F10). In doing so, he emphasized the importance of the priests' blessings. It suggests that Mary was waiting for the blessing in order to walk for the first time. Contrary to the iconographer, both *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion* underline the exceptionality of Mary since she could walk at six months.

Fresco eleven (F11) represents the entrance of Mary into the Temple at the age of three, narrated in the *Protogospel* 7:2-8:1 and the *Synaxarion* 21 November 3-15. Both the

Protogospel 7:1 and the *Synaxarion* 21 November 1-2 relate the dialog between Joachim and Anna when Mary was two years old, concerning her dedication to the Temple, an episode not depicted in the fresco series. Joachim wanted to take Mary to the Temple when she was two years old in order to keep their promise of consecrating her to God from her earliest years. Anna asked Joachim to wait until their daughter was three years old to be sure that she will not grieve for her parents. The *Protogospel* relates the dialogue between Joachim and Anna and narrates the entry of the Virgin Mary into the Temple immediately after her birth, whereas, in the *Synaxarion*, the same stories are described in the *Synaxarion* 21 November 1-15, the feast day of the *Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple*. If we skip the feast days of other saints (celebrated between 9 September and 20 November), the *Synaxarion* follows the strict order of the *Protogospel* concerning the Virgin Mary.

After the *Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple*, the iconographer depicted the *Annunciation* (F12). This story is narrated in the *Protogospel* 11:1-3 and the *Synaxarion* 25 March, the day when the feast of the *Annunciation* is liturgically celebrated. Between 21 November and 25 March, the *Synaxarion* narrates the lives of saints celebrated between these two Marian feasts. The *Protogospel* relates many events between the *Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple* and the *Annunciation* which are not depicted in the fresco series. Thus, the *Protogospel* says that Mary lived in the Temple until she was twelve years old, when the priests decided for her departure, since she had reached the age of maturity (PJ 8:1-2). An angel instructed Zachariah, the High-Priest, how to choose the man who will take care of the Virgin Mary (PJ 8:3). Zachariah did as the angel told him and assembled the widowers of the people. He asked them to bring their rods to the Temple so that God would show who will be assigned to take care of the Virgin (PJ 9:1). After the priest's

prayers at the altar of the Temple over all the rods, a dove came out from Joseph's rod and flew upon his head. The priest decided that Joseph would be the Virgin's protector (PJ 9:1-2). Joseph took Mary to his house, and then went away to build "his buildings", thus leaving her alone. In the meantime, priests from the Temple asked virgins of the tribe of David to make a veil for the Temple. The High-Priest gave the Virgin Mary two linens to spin, purple and scarlet (PJ 10). All these stories (Zachariah's prayer, the election of Joseph to take care of the Virgin Mary, and the High-Priest's giving to her two linens to spin for the Temple's veil) are illustrated in many fresco series depicting the life of the Mother of God, but they are not illustrated in the church of Humor Monastery.³²⁸ The *Synaxarion* also narrates how, on a sign from God, the High Priest chose Joseph to become the protector and guardian of the Virgin Mary, though it does not include as many details as are in the *Protogospel* (S 26 September 33 St. Joseph the Betrothed). The Moldavian iconographer left out these stories and directly depicted the *Annunciation* (F12) after the *Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple*.

The next fresco (F13) illustrates St. Joseph questioning the Virgin Mary about her pregnancy, narrated in the *Protogospel* 13:1 -14:1 and the *Synaxarion* 26 December 34-36, the day of celebrating Joseph in the Orthodox Church.³²⁹ The *Protogospel* relates the Virgin's visit to her cousin St. Elisabeth (PJ 12:2-3) first and only later does it mention Joseph questioning Mary about her pregnancy (PJ 13:1-14:1). Following the *Protogospel*, the *Synaxarion* 26 December 34 also describes Mary's visit to Elisabeth before Joseph

³²⁸ For the list of the most important churches where these themes are depicted, see: Lafontaine Dosgne, *op.cit.*, vol.1 pp. 167-179.

³²⁹ The Orthodox Church celebrates St. Joseph on the first Sunday after the Nativity of Christ. If there is not a Sunday between December 25th (the day of the Nativity of Christ) and January 1st, the celebration is held on December 26th.

questioning her about her pregnancy, but the Visitation as such is extensively recounted only later in *Synaxarion* 24 June 1-4, the day of celebration for the birth of St. John the Baptist, St. Elisabeth's son. As we shall see, the scene of the Visitation is depicted a little later, in F 17, contrasting with the order of the *Protogospel* in PJ 12. Nevertheless, here the iconographer is following the order of the *Protogospel* since the sequence of days in the *Synaxarion* is mixed.

After the fresco of Joseph questioning the Virgin Mary about her pregnancy, the iconographer illustrated the story of the Mother of God drinking the water of conviction (F14), narrated in the *Protogospel* 15:1-16:2, but not in the *Synaxarion*. Although related to the *Protogospel*, the iconographer did not faithfully depict the story, but portrayed only the Mother of God drinking the water in contrast with the text which says that both Mary and Joseph drank the water. Nevertheless, sequence is maintained.

The iconic narration continues with F15 depicting the Virgin's enrolment in the census narrated in both the *Protogospel* 17:1 and the *Synaxarion* S 25 December 1-3. Once more, the narrations say that both Mary and Joseph went for the enrolment. The *Protogospel* mentions even Joseph's sons, but the iconographer depicts only Mary.

Fresco 16 shows St. Joseph coming to meet the Virgin Mary. The story of Joseph meeting Mary is narrated much earlier in the *Protogospel* 8:2-9:3 and in the *Synaxarion* 21 November 21-28, and 26 December 33. Immediately after the fresco depicting this meeting, another meeting is depicted, namely that between the Virgin and St. Elisabeth (F 17), which is narrated in the *Protogospel* 12:2 (before Joseph questioning Mary about her pregnancy) and in the *Synaxarion* 24 June 1-4. These last three frescoes presented above (Mary's enrolment in the census, Joseph coming to Mary, and the Visitation) are not

depicted in the order narrated in the *Protogospel*. The iconographer decided to depict them out of the narration thread, probably to highlight that the governor of Judea, Joseph and Elisabeth, had the honour of privately meeting the Virgin Mary, the future Mother of God.

For the next fresco (F18), the iconographer returned to the narrative thread, and after the enrolment to the census he depicted the *Nativity of Christ* as narrated in both texts, the *Protogospel* 17:3-20:3 and the *Synaxarion* 25 December 1-56.

Fresco F19 depicts the *Synaxis (assembly for liturgical purposes) of the Mother of God*, an image corresponding to the feast of 26 December. The feast is described in the *Synaxarion* 26 December 1-15. In the *Protogospel* there is no mention about a Church celebration of the *Synaxis of the Mother of God*. In fact, in the *Protogospel*, after the birth of Christ there are only two more events: the massacre of the innocents and the murder of the High-Priest Zachariah. Thus, we might assume that the *Synaxarion* was the source for this fresco.

The next two frescoes (F20 and F21) illustrate the flight into Egypt and the return from Egypt of the Holy Family, narrated in the *Synaxarion* 26 December 1-15 and 26 December 16-27 respectively, but not in the *Protogospel*. The *Synaxarion* seems to be the source of this fresco, yet the events are described also in the Gospel of Matthew 2:13-15 and 2:19-23. These two themes have always been considered as depictions of the canonical Gospel and not of the *Synaxarion*.

The following fresco (F22), Christ “reposing” (*Anapeson*), is a rare image in Moldavian iconography. The *Anapeson* does not have as its narrative source either the *Synaxarion* or the *Protogospel*. It is the representation of Genesis 49:9 which reads: “Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness-who dares to rouse him?” and of its

liturgical paraphrase: the lion when sleeping keeps his eyes open, just as Christ sleeps as man but is awake as God.³³⁰

As the previous fresco (F22), the next fresco (F23) did not have an equivalent narrative sequence in either the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion*. It shows the Mother of God in prayer, and, as Nicolae Cartoian asserts, is the depiction of the *Apocalypse of the Holy Mother of God*.³³¹

The last fresco (F24) in the series depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” illustrates St. Joachim’s accepted sacrifice, narrated at the beginning of the *Protogospel* (PJ 5:1), but not in the *Synaxarion*. The text relates how Joachim, after receiving the news that his wife will have a child, went to the Temple a second time with his offering. He prayed to see a special plate placed in the altar. The text of the *Protogospel* suggests that seeing the plate was reserved exclusively for those who were cleansed of their sins. The Moldavians depicted this scene in a very original manner (see below the comparative analysis of the content of the frescoes and texts).

In comparing the order of the frescoes and the scenes in the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion*, one can easily notice that the frescoes do not faithfully follow the chronology of events of either of the two literary sources. In principle, when the three series follow the same order, we assume that the source is the *Protogospel*. When the iconographer departs from the order of one source, he departs also from the other source, since both sources follow the same logical, chronological order. From this partial analysis, we can conclude

³³⁰ Buculei, “Programul iconographic al gropnitelor moldovenesti”, p. 90.

³³¹ Nicolae Cartoian, *Cartile populare in literatura romaneasca. Epoca influenței sud slave* vol.1 (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Enciclopedica Romana, 1974), pp. 93-103. For information concerning the text of the *Apocalypse of the Holy Mother of God*, date, provenance, etc., see: Richard Bauckham, “The Conflict of Justice and Mercy: Attitudes to the Damned in Apocalyptic Literature,” *Apocrypha*, 1, 1990, pp. 181-183.

that both sources were used by the iconographer, since some scenes appear only in the *Protogospel*, while others are present only in the *Synaxarion*.

Furthermore, there are frescoes having other literary sources besides the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion*, namely Genesis 49:9 and the apocryphal text *Apocalypse of the Holy Mother of God*. For a more precise assessment, I will analyze, in the following section, the contents of the frescoes and the literary sources.

5.8. The Analysis of the Frescoes and the Corresponding Written Narratives

For a more pointed analysis of the transposition into frescoes of the literary content from the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion*, the literary sources will be placed side by side and will be analyzed in relation to the corresponding fresco. There will be words or sentences highlighted to facilitate the identification of the narrative source for each fresco. All the frescoes are numbered in the order of their depiction on the walls of the *gropnita* (F1, F2, etc.) and are reproduced at the end of the dissertation (APPENDIX 1).

F1: The Tabernacle of the Old Testament of the Jews

The first fresco of the series depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” is entitled *The Tabernacle, the Old Testament (or Covenant) of the Jews* and does not have literary equivalence in either the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion*.³³²

³³² The majority of the titles of the frescoes are in Church Slavonic, a language for the liturgy used at that time in Moldavian churches. Church Slavonic was the liturgical language in Moldavia until the late seventeenth century. Besides knowledge of Church Slavonic, one needs theological and iconographical knowledge to understand the contractions and abbreviations of the words. In the titles, there are some words which are not in Church Slavonic but in medieval Bulgarian, one of its forms. Moreover, some words follow Greek grammar whereas others are very faded and impossible to decipher. To decode the complex titles of the frescoes, I received assistance from Dr. Ihor Kutash, the Mitred Archpriest of Saint Mary the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Montreal and from Dr. Oleg Bychkov, Professor at St. Bonaventure University in Olean, New York.

F2: Joachim Gives His Gifts to the Temple

PJ 1:1-2

In the ‘Histories of the Twelve Tribes of Israel’ **Joachim was a very rich man**, and brought all his gifts for the Lord God twofold; for he said in himself: What I bring in excess, shall be for the whole people, and what I bring for forgiveness of my sins shall be for my Lord God for a propitiation for me.

Now the **great day of the Lord** drew near, and the **children of Israel were bringing their gifts**. Then they stood before him and **Reuben** also, saying:

‘It is not fitting for you to offer your first gifts, because you have begotten no offspring in Israel.’

S 8 September 10-12

¹⁰God in his wisdom observed the barrenness of human nature before the coming of Christ by leaving Joachim and Anna childless until they were very old. ¹¹**Joachim, who was both rich and devout** prayed without ceasing, and offered gifts to God that he would deliver his wife and himself from their reproach among men. ¹²**One feast day**, he (**Joachim**) had gone to the Temple **to present his offering**, when one of the congregations of the tribe of **Reuben** turned to him and said: **‘You are not allowed to offer with us because you have no child.’**

The *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion* describe how Joachim's offering was rejected by Reuben because he was childless. Reuben is presented in the texts cited above without any mention of his hierarchical position. Yet in the fresco he wears liturgical vestments, which is an iconic indication that he is a High Priest. Moreover, the High Priest is haloed, although the texts do not allude to his holiness. Sts. Joachim and Anna also have haloes, but this is typical in iconography for saints honoured by the Church.

The High Priest at the extreme left of the fresco holds his left hand open in rejection of the gifts, as the texts say. Joachim’s material richness mentioned in both texts is underlined by the depiction of a lamb as Joachim’s offering, in contrast to the dove which was the offering made by poor people. In the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion* narratives,

Joachim attempts to make his offering alone, while in fresco Anna is also present at the Temple.

The iconographer created in F2 a new narrative unit by selecting some elements from the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion*, and leaving out others, while including elements not present in either text. By using this filtration and the insertion of new elements, the iconographer arrived at a new narrative unit. There is no particular evidence to decide definitively whether the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion* is the ultimate source of this fresco.

F3: The Angel of the Lord Appeared to Joachim in a Desert

PJ 1:4

And Joachim **was very sad**, and did not show himself to his wife, **but betook himself to the wilderness**, there he pitched his tent, and fasted forty days and forty nights; and he said to himself: ‘I shall not go down either for food or for drink until the Lord my God visits me; prayer shall be my food and drink.’³³³

PJ 4:2

And behold there came **two messengers** who said to Anna: ‘Behold Joachim your husband is coming with his flocks; for **an angel of the Lord came down to him** and said to him: ‘Joachim, Joachim, the Lord God had heard your prayer. Go down; behold your wife Anna shall conceive.’

S 8 September 13-14, 18

¹³Those words cut Joachim to the heart and instead of returning home, **he went up into a mountain alone** to pray and **weep** while, ¹⁴at the same hour, Anna too was shedding abundant tears and fervently imploring Heaven....

¹⁸Joachim too was visited by **an Angel** and told to lead his flocks homeward, and to rejoice with his wife and their entire house, because God had determined to put an end to their reproach.

In the fresco, Joachim is in deep grief, as both texts mention, and he does not seem to have noticed the presence of an angel who has come down from heaven. Joachim’s ‘ignorance’ underlines the fact that the angel appeared to him alone, not to the two

³³³ Schneemelcher and Wilson, eds., *op.cit.*, p. 426.

messengers who delivered the message to Anna. Only the *Protogospel* speaks about the messengers depicted in the fresco, but at the same time Joachim is shown sitting on a rock and the whole background is full of mountains, a detail that is mentioned only in the *Synaxarion*. It is worth mentioning that ‘wilderness,’ ‘desert’ and ‘mountain’ were interchangeable for the author of the *Protogospel*.³³⁴ Frequently, in iconic representations, mountains, wilderness or desert take the shape of stepping mountains symbolizing the ladder of ascent to God through fasting and prayer. This step-like feature is also an indication that solitude brings one closer to God. For example, in the icons of St. Antony of Egypt (also named Antony the Great or of the Desert) and of St. Mary of Egypt, the desert is depicted as a mountainous background. It could be the same for the Moldavian iconographer, wilderness, desert and mountains being interchangeable, since in the title of the fresco he mentioned that the angel of the Lord appeared to Joachim in a desert and he depicted a mountain.

Although the texts are similar, the presence in the fresco of the two messengers might be an indication that the *Protogospel* was the literary source of the fresco, since the messengers are mentioned only in the *Protogospel*.

F4: Anna Prays in a (Cell?) Garden

PJ 2:4 - 4:3

And Anna was very sad; but she **put off her mourning garments, cleansed her head, put on her bridal garments**, and about the ninth hour went into her garden to walk there. And she **saw a laurel tree**, and sat beneath it, and implored the Lord, saying: ‘O, God of my fathers, bless me and hear my prayer, as thou didst bless the womb of (our mother) Sarah, and gave her a son, Isaac.’ And Anna sighed towards heaven and **saw a nest of sparrows, in the laurel tree** and immediately she made lamentation within herself: Alas, who begot me and what womb brought me forth? Because, I alone become a curse before the children

³³⁴ For the interchangeability of the words ‘mountain,’ ‘desert’ and ‘wilderness’ in the *Protogospel*, see: Émile de Strycker, *op.cit.*, pp. 419-421.

of Israel. And I have been reproached, and I was pushed out of the temple of my Lord God. Alas, to what have I been likened? I am not like the fowls of the heaven, because even the fowls of the heaven are fruitful before you, Lord. Alas! To what have I been likened? I am not like the fowls, because even the beasts of the earth are productive before you, Master. Alas! to what have I been likened? I am not likened these waters, for even these waters are fruitful before you Holy, and their fish bless you Lord. And behold **an angel of the Lord appeared**, saying: ‘Anna, Anna, the Lord God had heard your prayer. You shall conceive and bear and your seed shall be spoken of in the whole world.’ And Anna said: ‘As the Lord my God lives, if I beget either male or female, I will bring it (as a gift) to the Lord my God and it shall minister to Him all the days of its life.’

S 8 September 14-18 and S 9 December 3

¹⁴At the same hour, Anna too was shedding abundant tears and fervently imploring Heaven. ¹⁵Our God, who is rich in mercy and full of compassion, heard their entreaties and sent **the messenger** of His benevolence and herald of our salvation, **the Archangel Gabriel**, to Anna. ¹⁶He announced that she would conceive in her old age and bear a child, who would be the praise of the whole earth. ¹⁷Full of joy and amazement she exclaimed: ‘As the Lord my God lives, whether the child I bear be a son or a daughter, I will consecrate it to the Lord my God to serve Him all the days of its life.’

³Now when the time of preparation determined by the Lord had been fulfilled, **God sent an Angel** to Joachim in solitude on a mountain, and **to Anna in her affliction weeping in her garden**, to tell them that the ancient prophecies were soon to be fulfilled in them

One reads in the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion* that St. Anna prayed in her garden, but the *Protogospel*, in contrast with the *Synaxarion*, mentions a detail, namely a laurel tree with a nest of sparrows on its branches. Although the title did not mention a garden (the exact title is “Anna prays in a cell” (?) (Анна молится въ кѣль)), in the fresco, the garden is indicated by a well. There is also depicted the laurel tree with the nest of sparrows, as described in the *Protogospel*. Anna is standing in the middle of a garden, with an unhappy face, looking upward to heaven and with her arms lifted up in prayer, waiting for mercy. In both texts, Anna deplored her barren condition and prayed for God’s mercy. Both texts tell how an angel of the Lord appeared to Anna announcing that God heard her entreaty and that she would conceive and bear a child. The *Synaxarion* gives the name of the angel as Gabriel. In the fresco, the angel does not appear, because in iconography

Gabriel, the Archangel of good news, is depicted only with the Virgin Mary in the icon of *Annunciation*, and never with Anna. Yet the ‘proof’ that God heard and fulfilled Anna’s petition is symbolized by a hand extended through the clouds from heaven and blessing Anna.

The primary literary source for this fresco appears to be the *Protogospel* (PJ 2:4-4:4) since it gives more details relating to the place of prayer, details which are also depicted in the fresco. Likewise, the iconographer takes into consideration the traditional way of depicting Anna in prayer and not the moment of her meeting with God’s angel, which could confuse the viewer concerning the identity of Anna and her daughter.

F5: Joachim and Anna Praying at a Distance from One Another

The fresco F5 is placed in the upper right side of fresco F4 and continues above the upper part of a polygonal column. The column hides the staircase, which leads to a secret room placed above the *gropnita*. F5 is a small and hardly perceptible fresco depicting the same themes as both F3 and F4, but in a different manner. In F3 and F4, Joachim and Anna are depicted in prayer in separate frescoes, whereas in F5 they are placed together in the same fresco, both in prayer in a sort of paradisiacal garden, but back to back, which is an allusion to the fact that they did not know about one another’s prayer. In this fresco, Joachim is pictured turning to the right, and from the right upper corner a hand extends out from the clouds blessing him, whereas Anna is turned towards the left, and from the upper left corner, the same hand is extended to bless her. The title of the fresco, *Joachim and Anna Praying at a Distance from One Another*, emphasizes what both texts narrate, that Joseph and Anna beseeched God to deliver them from their barrenness.

In Orthodox iconography in general, and in Moldavian iconography in particular, Joachim and Anna depicted as praying is only as part of the “Life of the Mother of God” having as literary source the *Protogospel of James*. Other icons of Sts. Joachim and Anna, which are not part of the “Life of the Mother of God”, depict them facing one another or embracing each other. A relevant example of this is in the narthex of the church of Humor monastery, where the *Synaxarion* for the months of September, October, and November are depicted day by day. Sts. Joachim and Anna are celebrated on 9 September and, consequently, they are depicted immediately after the birth of Mary, which is celebrated on 8 September. Thus, for September 9, there is a fresco depicting Joachim and Anna next to each other, each pointing towards the other, in contrast to their depiction back to back in the *gropnita*.

F6: The Kiss of Joachim and Anna

PJ 4:4

And, behold, Joachim came with his flocks, and Anna stood **at the gate** and saw Joachim coming and ran immediately **and hung on his neck** saying: ‘Now I know that the Lord God had greatly blessed me.’

S 8 September 18

¹⁸Joachim too was visited by an Angel and told to lead his flocks homeward, and to rejoice with his wife and their entire house, because God had determined to put an end to their reproach.

The iconic narration of the “Life of the Mother of God” continues with the meeting of Joachim and Anna. This image is the traditional marriage icon, and in contrast to the images of Joachim or Anna in prayer, it is depicted not only as a part of the “Life of the Mother of God”, but also as an individual icon.

In the *gropnita*, the iconographer used the traditional representation of this theme with Joachim on the left side and Anna on the right, cheek to cheek, both expressing affection. In the background are houses and, as the *Protogospel* says, there is a gate that seems to serve as a city entrance. The embracing of Joachim and Anna is narrated in the *Protogospel*. The *Synaxarion* does not describe the meeting itself, hence, the *Protogospel* seems to be the source of this fresco.

F7: The Nativity of the Mother of God

PJ 5:2

And her months were fulfilled, as the angel had said: in the seventh (ninth) month **Anna** brought forth. And Anna said to the **midwife**: ‘What have I brought forth?’ And the midwife said: ‘A female.’ And Anna said ‘My soul is magnified this day.’ And she laid it down. And when the days were fulfilled, Anna purified herself from her childbed and gave suck to the child, and called her name **Mary**.³³⁵

S 8 September 19-22

¹⁹When nine months had passed, **Anna** gave birth, and asked the **midwife**: ‘Whom have I brought into the world?’ ²⁰‘A daughter’, she replied. ²¹‘My soul has been magnified this day,’ exclaimed Anna and gently laid down the child. ²²And when the days of her purification according to the law were accomplished, she arose, washed, gave suck to the child and called her **Mary**, the name obscurely awaited by the Patriarchs, the Prophets and the Righteous, and by which God would reveal the mystery hidden from all eternity.

The second fresco of the second row illustrates, as the title indicates, the *Nativity of the Mother of God*. Being one of the major feasts of the Orthodox Church, the illustration of this feast is part of the church’s iconic plan. Therefore, in the church of Humor Monastery, the image can be seen not only in the narrative cycle of the life of the Virgin Mary, but also in the narthex as part of the depiction of the *Synaxarion* for the month of September, on the iconostasis, and on portable icons. In the *gropnita*, the iconographer

³³⁵ Schneemelcher mentions the seventh month, and in brackets the ninth, because the manuscripts show different readings. For the number of manuscripts containing seven or nine months for Anna’s pregnancy, see: Emile de Strycker s.j., *op.cit.*, p. 87, note 6.

does not innovate but follows the traditional representation of this theme. Therefore, one can easily see the similarities between this fresco and the one depicted in the narthex of the church.

We cannot state with certainty whether or not this fresco has only the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion* as literary source, since the iconography of the major feasts was very well established in sixteenth century Moldavia, as well as for the rest of the Orthodox world, but we can state that both the iconography of this theme and the *Synaxarion* are based on the account of the *Protogospel*.³³⁶

F8: Anna Gives the Mother of God to Joachim

S 9 September 1

¹It is **as mediators** of our Salvation **through the Mother of God** who was born of them, that we honor the righteous Joachim and Anna on this day, not (as is customary in the feasts of Saints) the memory of their departure from this life.

The fresco representing the Virgin Mary with her parents is titled *Anna Gives the Mother of God to Joachim* and it depicts Mary's loving family. This emphasizes that Mary is the fruit of love between Joachim and Anna. They are depicted as a beautiful old couple sitting on a bench, Joachim having his hands open to receive from Anna their daughter. Mary is shown kneeling with her arms raised in prayer, foreshadowing the life of prayer that she will have later.

This sort of scene is rare. Researchers have tried to find the literary source of this depiction. Alfredo Tradigo considers the Homilies of St. John Damascene and the Homilies of St. Photius on the Birth of the Virgin as sources of inspiration for this iconic depiction,

³³⁶ Hieromonk Makarios explains the origin of this feast as being the *Protogospel of James*. See: the *Synaxarion* vol. 1 p. 60. See also: Gaetano Passarelli, *Icônes des grandes fêtes byzantines*, translated from Italian by Jacques Mignon (Paris, France: Les éditions du Cerf, 2005), p. 32.

where the intimacy of Mary's family is mentioned.³³⁷ Laura Spitzer points out that the inclusion of this scene in the iconic cycle of the life of Mary might be part of the tendency to expand the iconic representation of her early life.³³⁸ Spitzer also suggests that this representation has great importance for the family and balances the first scenes which emphasize the grief caused by childlessness. Yet, the inclusion of this fresco after the birth of the Mother of God might be the influence of the *Synaxarion* on the fresco series that celebrates Joachim and Anna on 9 September, immediately after 8 September, the day of the birth of the Virgin Mary. What is peculiar in the *gropnita* is that the iconographer did not depict Joachim and Anna in the same way as they are in the narthex, where the *Synaxarion* for the month of September is depicted. In the *gropnita*, alongside Sts. Joachim and Anna, the iconographer also portrayed their daughter, probably to emphasize that Joachim and Anna 'are mediators of our Salvation through the Mother of God who was born of them', as the *Synaxarion* says.

The iconic narration of the *Life of the Mother of God* continues with the representation of the blessings Mary received from the priests, presented below.

F9: The Blessing by the Priests

PJ 6:2

On the child's first birthday, **Joachim made a great feast**, and invited the chief priests, and the priests, and the scribes, and the elders, and the whole people of Israel. And Joachim brought the child **to the priests**; and they blessed her, saying 'O, God of our fathers, bless this child, and give her a name renowned for ever among all generations.' And the people

³³⁷ Alfredo Tradigo, *Icons and Saints of the Eastern Orthodox Church*, translated by Stephen Sartarelli (Los Angeles: Getty Publication, 2006), p. 97.

³³⁸ Laura Spitzer, "The Cult of the Virgin and Gothic Sculpture: Evaluating Opposition in the Chartres West Facade Capital Frieze," *Gesta* 33, no. 2 (1994), p. 139.

said ‘so be it, so be it, amen.’ And he brought her to **the chief priests (high-priests)**, and they blessed her, saying ‘O, God of the heavenly heights, look upon this child, and bless her with a supreme and unsurpassable blessing.’

S 8 September 27-31

²⁷ When the child was one year old, **Joachim gave a great feast**. ²⁸ He invited the priests, the scribes, and all the Council and people of Israel. ²⁹ He presented Mary **to the priests**, and they blessed her, saying ‘God of our fathers, bless this little child, and give her an everlasting name to be named of all generations.’ ³⁰ And all the people responded ‘Let it be so, let it be so! Amen.’ ³¹ Joachim also presented her **to the high priest**, who blessed her saying ‘God of infinite majesty, look down upon this little child and grant her a blessing, supreme and beyond compare.’

The *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion* describe how, at the age of six months, Mary walked for the first time and they continue with the story of the blessings Mary received from the priests at the age of one. The iconographer reversed the two events and depicted first the blessings Mary received, and then her first steps.

The story of the blessings Mary received is depicted in a simple manner. The viewer does not have to make a great effort to understand that ‘the great feast’ Joachim gave, which both texts recount, is affirmed by the presence on the right side of the fresco of a young man having in his hand a cup of wine. Alongside the young man, Joachim is depicted presenting his daughter to the priests to receive their blessing, whereas Anna is not depicted because both texts describe that she was not with Joachim when he brought the Virgin Mary to the priests. We note that the iconographer replaced the Old Testament blessing with an Orthodox Christian blessing, and the chief priests bless the child as Orthodox Christian priests do (with the fingers of their hands arranged to form the abbreviation of Christ’s name), all of them, that is, except for the first priest, who points, with his right hand, toward the future Mother of God.

The narrations speak about two blessings received by the Virgin Mary: one from the regular priests and one from the chief priests. The iconographer chose to represent the

blessing of the high-priests, a more important blessing than that from the priests. This aspect is alluded to twice: first, the priests wear *phylacteries* (small boxes, containing strips of parchment inscribed with quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures), characteristic in iconography of the Jewish high-priests, second, they bless with both hands as only bishops do in the Orthodox Church. Both high-priests have long beards, long hair, and are dressed in similar liturgical vestments, which place them on an equal hierarchical status. When referring to high-priests, the *Protogospel* uses the plural, whereas the *Synaxarion* uses the singular. Since in fresco there are depicted two high-priests, we can conclude that the iconographer used the *Protogospel* as literary source.

F10: The Coming of the Mother of God to Her Mother Anna

PJ 6:1

When **she was six months old**, her mother stood the child on the ground to try if she could stand. And **she walked seven steps and returned** to her bosom. And she took her up saying ‘As the Lord my God lives, you shall walk no more upon this ground until I take you into the Temple of the Lord.’ And she made a sanctuary in her bedchamber, and did not permit anything common or unclean to pass through it. And she summoned **the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews**, and they amused her.

S 8 September 23-26

²³The child grew strong and her mother placed her on the ground when **she was six months old** to see if she would stand up. ²⁴Confidently **Mary took seven paces and then turned back** and clung to her mother’s breast. ²⁵Anna lifted her up saying, ‘As the Lord my God lives, you shall tread on the ground no more until I take you into the Temple of the Lord.’ ²⁶Her mother kept the room where the child was as a holy place, and no unlovely or unclean thing entered there, and she brought **daughters of Hebrews of pure lineage** to play with the child

The story of the life of the Mother of God in the frescoes continues illustrating her first steps. The iconographer applied to the fresco an original title: *The Coming of the*

Mother of God to Her Mother Anna. The depiction of Mary's first steps appears exclusively in the series of frescoes depicting her life, but sometimes it is missing even from this series. Lafontaine-Dosogne discovered this theme only in the church Kariye Camii in Constantinople, in four churches in Macedonia and Serbia, in the church of Lavra monastery at Mont Athos, and in one Bulgarian church.³³⁹ She did not mention the church of Humor monastery, apparently because she did not know that there was a complete series of the "Life of the Mother of God."

The fresco depicts, as the title states, the return of Mary to her mother after walking seven steps. The image shows Anna, Mary, and, behind Mary, a servant who is one of the 'undefiled daughters of the Hebrews (of pure lineage)' mentioned in both texts. By contrast with the iconographer, the texts place this scene before the blessing of the priests when Mary was one year old, underling the miraculous life Mary lived since she could walk at six months. The texts are very similar and there is no particular evidence to discriminate between the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion* as the ultimate source of this fresco.

According to the written narrations, after ascertaining the precocity of her daughter, Anna decided to transform Mary's room into a sanctuary in order to avoid any impure contact for her daughter. The theme of the *Withdrawal of Mary in the Sanctuary of Her Room* is not depicted in the *gropnita*. Instead, the iconographer decided to depict directly the scene of the Virgin's consecration to the Temple at the age of three, presented below.

F11: The Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple

PJ 7:1-8:1

The months passed, and the child grew. When she was two years old, Joachim said to Anna: Let us bring her up to the Temple of the Lord, that we may fulfil the promise which

³³⁹ Lafontaine-Dosogne, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p. 121-125.

we made, lest the Lord send (some evil) upon us and our gift become unacceptable.’ And Anna replied: ‘Let us wait until the third year that the child may not long after her father and mother.’ And Joachim said: ‘Very well.’

And when **the child was three years old, Joachim said ‘Let us call the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews, and let each one take each a lamp, and let them be burning,** in order that the child may not turn back, and her heart be enticed away from the Temple of the Lord. And he did so until they went up to the Temple of the Lord. **And the priest took her and kissed her and blessed her,** saying ‘The Lord has magnified your name among all generations; because of you the Lord at the end of the days will manifest his redemption to the children of Israel.’ And **he placed her on the third step of the altar,** and the Lord God put grace upon the child, and she danced for joy with her feet, and the whole house of Israel loved her.

And her parents went down wondering, praising and glorifying the almighty God, because the child did not turn back (to them). And **Mary was in the Temple nurtured like a dove and received food from the hand of an angel.**

S 21 November 3-15

³When **she was three,** her parents decided to fulfill their vow and to **present their child at the Temple.** ⁴**Joachim summoned daughters of Hebrews of pure lineage to attend on her and to go before her into the Temple carrying flaming torches,** so that the child, attracted by their light, might not be tempted to turn back towards her parents. ⁵But the **Holy Virgin,** born all pure and raised by God from her birth to a height of virtue and of love for the things of Heavens above every other creature, **ran forward towards the temple.** ⁶Overtaking her attendant maidens and with never a glance back at the world, **she threw herself into the arms of the High Priest Zacharias, who was waiting for her at the gate of the Temple with the Elders.** ⁷**Zacharias blessed her** saying: *The Lord has glorified thy name in every generation. ⁸It is in thee that he will reveal the Redemption that he has prepared for his people in the last days.* ⁹Then **he brought the Child into the Holy of Holiest** – which was an unheard-of thing under the Old Covenant for only the High Priest was allowed to enter there once a year on the Day of Atonement. ¹⁰**He sat her down on the third step of the altar** whereupon the Lord caused his Grace to descend upon her. ¹¹She arose and expressed her joy in a dance. ¹²Wonder seized all who contemplated this sight that bespoke the marvels God would soon accomplish in her.

¹³Having in this manner abandoned the world, her parents and all connexion with things of the senses, the Holy Virgin dwelt in the temple for the next nine years until, reaching marriageable age, she was taken from the sanctuary by the priests and elders, who feared lest the custom of women come upon her there. ¹⁴They entrusted her to the chaste Joseph as the guardian of her virginity, through to all appearances her Betrothed. ¹⁵**Our Most Holy Lady dwelt like a dove in the sanctuary, sustained by spiritual food brought by an angel of God,** until she was twelve years old.

The second row of frescoes on the eastern wall starts with the *Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple*, narrated in both the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion*. The left extremity of the fresco is extended on the northern wall, where the window of the *gropnita* is placed.

The name of this fresco is faded and difficult to decipher accurately. It seems that the iconographer gave a slightly different name to the fresco, *Introduction of Mary into the Temple*. Because we are not sure about the accuracy of the deciphered title, we prefer to use the current name of this well-known Orthodox feast: *The Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple*.

Although the name of the High Priest, Zachariah, is not mentioned in the title, he is the High Priest depicted in all the frescoes depicting the Virgin's entry into the Temple.³⁴⁰ St. Zachariah is mentioned in the *Synaxarion*. In the *Protogospel*, the name Zachariah is not mentioned at his meeting with Mary but two verses later, in *Protogospel* 8:3, when he asked God what to do with the Virgin when she reached the age of twelve. St. Zachariah's meeting with the future Mother of God at her entry into the Temple is important, since later when she came to the Temple with her child for purification, Zachariah placed her among the virgins.³⁴¹ Consequently, he is an important figure in iconography not only because he is the father of St. John the Baptist, but also because he recognized and revered the Mother of God.

The Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple is painted in the *gropnita* and in the church narthex, where the *Synaxarion* for the month of November is illustrated, more precisely 21 November, the celebration day of the feast, as well as on the iconostasis. The

³⁴⁰ See: *The Painter's Manual*, p. 336(295), which explains that Zachariah was the High Priest who received Mary in the Temple.

³⁴¹ Ouspensky and Lossky, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

painter of the *gropnita*, like the painters of the narthex and iconostasis, followed faithfully the traditional representation of this theme.

Researchers specializing in the iconography of the life of the Mother of God, although they agree that the origin of the feastal icon is in the *Protogospel*, argue that the life was also influenced by other sources. Thus, Andreas Nicolaides believes that the original depiction of the feast has its roots in the *Protogospel*, to which were added different paraphrases from the discourses of Cyril of Jerusalem and Demetrios of Antioch, the homilies of patriarchs Germanus and Tarasius, and the sermons of John Damascene and Andrew of Crete.³⁴² Gaetano Passarelli argues that the icon is precisely the transposition in colour of the *Protogospel*, but that it takes over the pattern of the icon of the *Presentation of Christ to the Temple*.³⁴³

There are frescos showing only St. Anna, and not St. Joachim, with the Virgin at her presentation to the Temple. One example of this kind of representation is in the church's narthex at Humor Monastery, where the fresco depicts only Anna next to Mary, in contrast with the fresco in the *gropnita* that depicts both Joachim and Anna alongside Mary. The presence of Anna alone in the iconography of the narthex seems to be very different from the *Synaxarion*, although, with very few exceptions, in the narthex the *Synaxarion* is faithfully depicted. This might be a consequence of the great veneration which St. Anna received in the Orthodox Church: Anna has three feast days in the Orthodox calendar, whereas Joachim does not have an individual feast day, but one in which he is celebrated together with his wife Anna.

³⁴² Nicolaïdès, "L'Église de la Panagia Arakiotissa à Lagoudéra, Chypre," p. 59.

³⁴³ Gaetano Passarelli, *op.cit.*, p. 68.

If one reads the excerpts from the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion* cited above, one can see that the texts have similarities but also quite a few differences. Both texts say that the priest blessed Mary, and the fresco shows the moment when Mary received the blessing. Both texts mention that the priest placed Mary on the third step of the altar, and the fresco depicts this detail behind the priest, on the upper left side. The texts also describe how Mary received food in the Temple from the hand of an angel, and the fresco shows this.

The texts also give details regarding the ‘daughters of the Hebrews’ who attend Mary’s consecration in the Temple. They carried in their hands flaming torches, according to the *Synaxarion*, in contrast with oil lamps, as the *Protogospel* has it. Emile de Strycker argues that, although the author of the *Protogospel* used the Greek word λαμπάς (‘oil lamp’), he is referring to a torch or to a candle.³⁴⁴ In the Gospel of Matthew 25:1-8, the same word, λαμπάς, means, precisely, ‘oil lamp,’ since the virgins are named foolish because they did not take any oil for their lamps. For ‘torch’ or ‘candle,’ there is another word, λύχνοι, which is used in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 12:35). It is problematic to accept de Strycker’s argument that the author of the *Protogospel* used the word lamp (λαμπάς), although he does not refer to oil lamp but to candles (λύχνοι).

In the fresco, the virgins who accompanied Mary do not have in their hands oil lamps, as the *Protogospel* reads, but flaming torches (or candles), as described in the *Synaxarion*, a detail which might show the influence of the *Synaxarion* on this fresco. One can determine that, in the *gropnita*, the iconography of the major feasts, as is the case of the

³⁴⁴ de Strycker, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

fresco presented above, is faithful to the Orthodox iconographical tradition. There are, however, also exceptions, for example the fresco of the *Annunciation* presented below.

Although both the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion* describe several events between the *Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple* and the *Annunciation*, the iconographer chose to depict the *Annunciation* immediately after the *Entry into the Temple*. One event, the meeting between St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary, is described in both narratives before the *Annunciation*, but the iconographer depicted it later (F16). I analyzed the content of the frescoes and their corresponding written narratives following the order of the frescoes as the iconographer depicted them on the walls of the *gropnita*, and I did not follow the order of events described in the written narratives.

F12: The Annunciation

PJ 11:1-3

And she (Mary) took the pitcher, and **went forth to draw water**, and behold, **a voice said** ‘Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed are thou among women.’ **And she looked towards the right side and the left, to see whence this voice came.** And trembling she went to her house and put down the pitcher and took the purple and sat down on her seat, and she drew out (the thread).

And behold an angel of the Lord stood before her saying: ‘Fear not, Mary, for you had found grace before the Lord of all, and you shall conceive of his Word.’ But Mary started to hesitate in herself, saying: ‘Shall I conceive by the Lord, the living God, as every woman brings forth?’

And behold the angel of the Lord stood before her saying: ‘Not so, Mary. But the Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you. Wherefore that holy which shall be born shall be called the Father’s one holy Son, the Son of the Highest God.’

And you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. And Mary said: ‘Behold the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.’

S 25 March 11-21

¹¹Six months after the miraculous conception of him who was in all things to be the Forerunner of the Lord (Luke 1:17), **Gabriel, the Angel of Divine Mercy**, was sent by

God to Nazareth in Galilee, **to the Virgin Mary**, who had, on leaving the Temple, been betrothed to Joseph, a righteous and chaste man, for him to guard her virginity.¹² **Appearing suddenly in the house in human form**, with a rod in his hand, the Angel greeted her who was to become the consolation of Eve's tears', saying: *Rejoice, thou that are highly favored; the Lord is with thee* (Luke 1:28).¹³ Before this strange apparition, the Virgin let fall her distaff and, deeply troubled by the words from this incorporeal being, asked herself if this proclamation of joy was not, as it had been for Eve, a new deception by him who well knew how *to transform himself into an angel of light* (II Cor. 11:14).¹⁴ But the Angel reassured her, and said to her: *Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God*.¹⁵ Do not wonder at my strange appearance or at these joyful words, although your nature, tricked in days of old by the serpent, has been condemned to you, and deliverance from the curse of our first mother (Gen. 3:16).¹⁶ *Behold, thou shalt conceive and bear a son. And, thou shalt call His name Jesus* (which means Savior). *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest*.

¹⁷On hearing these strange words, the Virgin exclaimed: *How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?*¹⁸ She did not doubt the divine word through lack of faith like Zacharias, who was punished for this with dumbness (Luke 1:20), but asked herself how this mystery could be brought about in her without the union of wedlock, which had become the law of reproduction of a human race subject to corruption.¹⁹ Understanding her doubts, the Angel laid no blame on her, but explained to her the new manner of this birth: *The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee; on her who was full of grace in preparation for His coming, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee*.²⁰ Then, reminding her that Elizabeth, who had been known as 'the barren one', had conceived a son in her old age, he showed her that there *where God so wishes, the order of nature is overcome*, and confirmed that the Holy Spirit, is coming upon her, would accomplish a miracle greater than that, the King of the universe, he who contains all things, would empty Himself through an ineffable condescension, in order to dwell in her womb, to mingle Himself with human nature in a union without confusion and clothe Himself in her flesh, steeped in her virginal blood as in royal purple.

²¹Bending her gaze humbly earthwards, and cleaving with her whole will to the divine plan, the Virgin replied: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word*.

The traditional iconic representation of the *Annunciation* follows the Gospel account (Luke 1:26-38) and the *Synaxarion* of the feast, and depicts the meeting, face to face, of the Virgin Mary with the Archangel Gabriel in her house. In the church of Humor monastery, the *Annunciation* is depicted in its traditional form four times in the fresco of the *Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God* and on the iconostasis, but not in the *gropnita*.

The fresco in the *gropnita* neither follows the traditional iconic model, nor has the traditional name of the feast, the *Annunciation*, but is titled *The Angel Announces*

[благовествует] [the birth] ... *the Mother of God* [Богородицы]. Because it is difficult to decipher the exact title, we use the traditional name of the feast: the *Annunciation*. The Moldavian iconographer chose to depict the first *Annunciation*, as narrated only in the *Protogospel*. The text describes two annunciations: first, we read how Mary received the news while she was fetching water for her household; second, the angel appears at Mary's house, identical with the story narrated in the *Synaxarion* which follows the account in the Gospel of St. Luke (Luke 1:26-38). The first *Annunciation* narrated in the *Protogospel* took place in the garden, alluded to in fresco by a little tree at the Virgin's left side. At the moment of the annunciation, Mary was at the well and her pitcher was inside the well as she was drawing water. In the fresco, the Virgin is turned towards the direction from which the voice of the angel came and, as the *Protogospel* says and as the fresco illustrates, she is perturbed by the angel's greeting, since she did not see him, but only heard his voice. In the fresco, the angel is carrying a scepter in his left hand, a symbol of imperial authority, and he is depicted with his right hand raised, a sign of blessing and a declamatory gesture. The angel's gesture is a transposition into fresco of the greeting from the *Protogospel*, the *Synaxarion*, and Luke 1:28: "Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

The depiction of the *Annunciation* having as literary source the *Protogospel* is rare in Orthodox iconography in general and in Moldavian iconography in particular. Another very rare depiction is *Joseph Questioning Mary* concerning her pregnancy, presented next.

F13: Joseph Questioning Mary

PJ 13:3 -14:1

And she remained three months with Elisabeth. Day by day her womb grew, and Mary was afraid and went into her house and hid herself from the children of Israel. And Mary was

sixteen years old when these mysterious things happened (to her). Now when **she was in her sixth month**, behold, Joseph came from his building and entered his house and found her with child.

And Joseph called Mary, and said to her: ‘You who are cared for by God, **why had you done this** and forgotten the Lord your God? **Why have you humiliated your soul**, you who were brought up in the Holy of Holies and received food from the hand of an angel?’ But she wept bitterly, saying: ‘**I am pure and I know not a man.**’ And Joseph said to her ‘**Whence then is that in your womb?**’ She said: ‘As the Lord my God lives, **I know not whence it has come to me.**’ And Joseph feared greatly and parted from her, pondering what he should do with her. And Joseph said: ‘If I conceal her sin, I shall be found opposing the law of the Lord. And if I expose her to the children of Israel, I fear lest that which is in her may have sprung from an angel, and I should be found delivering up innocent blood to the judgment of death. What then shall I do with her? I will put her away secretly.’

S 26 December 34-36

³⁴But during the days of their betrothal, the holy Virgin conceived by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and on her return to Nazareth, after spending **three months** with Elizabeth, **the first signs of maternity appeared in her**, to the bewilderment and distress of the pious and righteous **Joseph, who could not comprehend how the Virgin consecrated to the Lord could be guilty of secret relations.** ³⁵Strict morality required that he divorce her, but being a just and compassionate man he did not want to put the young girl to shame publicly; and so, having resorted to prayer, he decided to send her away quietly. ³⁶But an Angel of the Lord then appeared to him in a dream and reassured him, telling him that this conception was the work of the Holy Spirit and that he was to become the foster father of the Child, whom he should look after and bring up.

The fresco, *Joseph Questioning Mary*, summarizes the thirteenth chapter of the *Protogospel*, whereas in the *Synaxarion* there is no account of Joseph questioning Mary. The *Synaxarion* relates only that Joseph could not comprehend how the Virgin, consecrated to the Lord, could be guilty of secret relations, with no allusion to their discussion, while the *Protogospel* narrates their discussion in detail. The dialog between the two is alluded to in the fresco by their pointing to each other with their right hand. The fresco shows Mary in front of Joseph, in a humble attitude, her head being bent to the right, emphasizing her attempt to defend her innocence. At that time, St. Joseph did not believe the Virgin’s claim to innocence, and the fresco depicts this by his straight posture. Thus, we can state that this

fresco is based on the *Protogospel* rather than the *Synaxarion*. Moreover, the *Protogospel* narrates that the Virgin was already six months pregnant when St. Joseph returned from his constructions and saw her, while the *Synaxarion* expresses Joseph's distress when Mary was three months pregnant. In the fresco, the Virgin's pregnancy is very obvious, more like a six months pregnancy than the first signs of maternity.

The depiction of the pregnant Virgin is extremely rare in Orthodox churches. It is done only as part of the series of frescoes that depict her life. In Romania, it is uncommon to find this image, apart from Humor Monastery.³⁴⁵

Another unusual image in Orthodox iconography is *A Test about Christ's Incarnation*, the next fresco in the series of the "Life of the Mother of God," which continues the narrative of St. Joseph questioning the Mother of God.

F14: A Test about Christ's Incarnation

PJ 15:1-16:2

And he (Annas) went hastily to the priest and said to him: 'Joseph, for whom you are a witness, has grievously transgressed.' And the high priest said: 'In what way?' And he said: 'The virgin whom he received from the Temple of the Lord he has defiled, and has stolen marriage with her, and has not disclosed it to the children of Israel.' And the high priest said to him: 'Joseph has done this?' And Annas said to him: 'Send officers and you will find the virgin with child.' And the officers went and found her as he had said, and brought her to the Temple. And she stood before the court. And the priest said to her: 'Mary, why have you done this? Why have you humiliated your soul and forgotten the Lord your God, you who were brought up in the Holy of Holies, and received food from the hand of angels, and heard their hymns of praise, and danced before them? Why had you done this?'

But she wept bitterly, saying: 'As the Lord my God lives, I am pure before him and I know not a man.' And the high priest said: 'Joseph, why have you done this?' And Joseph said:

³⁴⁵ To my knowledge, the image of the pregnant Mother of God is depicted only at Humor monastery because only here is her life represented from the *Protogospel of James*. In addition, all the books I read about the iconic programs in Romanian churches did not mention any other church where the *Life of the Mother of God* is depicted. The website of the Romanian Orthodox Church mentions 15,218 places of worship and 637 monasteries in Romania. http://www.patriarhia.ro/ro/scurta_prezentare_en.html (accessed on December 2009).

‘As the Lord my God lives, and Christ lives and the witness of his truth, I am pure concerning her.’ And the high priest said: ‘You have consummated your marriage in secret, and have not disclosed it to the children of Israel, and have not bowed your head under the mighty hand in order that your seed might be blessed.’ And Joseph was silent.... And the high priest said: ‘I will give you to drink the water of the conviction of the Lord, and it will make manifest your sins before your eyes.’ And the high priest took the water, and gave it to Joseph to drink and sent him into the wilderness; and he come back whole. And he made Mary also drink, and sent her into the wilderness; and she also returned whole. And all the people marvelled, because the water had not revealed any sin in them. And the high-priest said: ‘If the Lord God had not made manifest your sins, neither do I condemn you’.

Immediately after the fresco *Joseph Questioning Mary*, the iconographer depicted the story of the Virgin Mary drinking the water of conviction, an episode narrated solely in the *Protogospel* 15:1-16:2. This fresco is entitled *A Test (Investigation) about Christ's Incarnation*, and as in a number of other titles, the iconographer incorporates technical theological terminology.

The story of Mary and Joseph drinking the water of conviction is mentioned on the odd occasion in sermons or in iconography and is not described in the *Synaxarion*, as are other stories from the life of the Mother of God.³⁴⁶ The story has its roots in the Old Testament, where Jewish law required that adultery be clearly established and where the accused woman is asked to prove her innocence by drinking the water of conviction. The water of conviction, prescribed in Num. 5:11-31, was given to the woman suspected of adultery and constituted a sort of ‘trial’ commanded by the Lord. The priest would take water in a vessel and mix it with dust from the floor of the tabernacle. The water became

³⁴⁶ Holy Apostles Convent, *The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos: Viewed and Treated within the Framework of Sacred Scriptures, Holy Tradition, Patristics and Other Ancient Writings, Together with the Liturgical and Iconographic Traditions of the Holy Orthodox Church* (Buena Vista, Colorado: Holy Apostles Convent 1989), p. 145.

bitter and would bring a curse upon an adulterous woman, making her belly swell and her thighs rot, but an innocent woman remained untouched by the curse.

The *Protogospel* describes how both the Mother of God and St. Joseph drank the “water of conviction” and then went into the wilderness and returned whole without any bodily symptoms, thus proving their innocence. It is significant that the iconographer illustrated only the Virgin’s test of innocence, according to the demands of the Book of Numbers (i.e. that only women be tested with the water of conviction), and not that of Joseph, according to the narration of the *Protogospel*. Joseph is on the left side of the fresco, with his arms open, pointing towards Mary in a pose similar to that of St. Anna. Their oratorical gesture proclaims the Virgin’s innocence.

I am not aware of the literary source that the iconographer used to depict St. Anna's presence at the trial. It might be connected with the legends that describe the lives of Sts. Joachim and Anna. According to these stories, St. Joachim died soon after the presentation of the Virgin to the Temple, but St. Anna lived longer.³⁴⁷ If she were alive when the Virgin had her trial, St. Anna’s presence at her daughter’s trial is consonant with the fresco.

The Mother of God is portrayed with open arms and bent towards the vessel held by the High Priest, from which she drinks the water of conviction. Her open arms and her bent position show her humility and acceptance of the trial for proving her innocence.

This fresco obviously has as its literary source the *Protogospel*, although it does not follow its account literally.

³⁴⁷ For the legends concerning the lives of Joachim and Anna, see: Joseph N. Sama, *A “Must Read” Divine Revelation of the Life History of Mary and Jesus* (USA: Xlibris, 2009), p. 71.

F15: The Enrolment in the Census of the Mother of God

PJ 17: 1

Now there went out a decree from the king Augustus, that all inhabitants of Bethlehem in Judea should be enrolled. And Joseph said: 'I shall enrol my sons, but what shall I do with this child? How shall I enrol her? As my wife? I am ashamed to do that. Or as my daughter? But all the children of Israel know that she is not my daughter. The day of the Lord himself will do as the Lord wills.'

Synaxarion 25 December 1-4

¹Caesar Augustus, the first Roman Emperor (30BC-AD14), having made all the peoples of the known world subject to his sole authority, decided, in the height of his power, to take a census of the vast population of the Empire, and he thereby became the unwitting instrument of the realization of God's plan. ²For in bringing together and establishing peace and harmony among the many peoples of the immense Empire, with their diverse customs and languages, he prepared them for the revelation of the One God in three Persons, and thus opened the way for the universal proclamation of the Gospel, in accordance with the divine promise: I shall give thee the nations for thine inheritance (Ps. 2:8). Thus this first census prophetically foretold the enrolment of the elect in the Book of Life (cf. Phil. 4:3; Rev. 21:27).

³The imperial decree reached Palestine when Quirinius was governor of Syria, and occasioned the fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah should be born in the lineage of Judah at Bethlehem, the native city of king David (Mic. 5:2). ⁴For Joseph, who was then with Mary at Nazareth in Galilee, had to be enrolled at Bethlehem, the town of his forefathers, even though the pregnancy was well advanced of her whom all took to be his wife.

The name of this fresco, depicted on the polygonal column inserted on the southern wall of the *gropnita*, is almost indecipherable. We guessed that the iconographer titled the fresco *The Enrolment to the Census of the Mother of God*. The story is narrated in both the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion*, with the difference that the account in the *Synaxarion* is based on the Gospel account (Luke 2:1-5), whereas the *Protogospel*, besides having the story itself, describes Joseph's anxiety concerning the way he should register the Virgin, as he was ashamed of her.

In the iconographic scene, we see the governor of Judea and behind him a servant, not mentioned by the texts. On the governor's left side is shown a scribe holding an unfurled scroll, on which he records names, an allusion to the census described in both texts. The Mother of God, while interrogated, stands before the governor in a graceful pose. Her head is bowed towards the scribe and she draws her *maphorion* modestly about her shoulders. In other iconic representations of this theme, St. Joseph is also shown behind Mary.³⁴⁸ The Moldavian iconographer perhaps did not represent Joseph in the fresco because the focus of the series of frescoes was the life of the Mother of God and Marian theology. We cannot determine between the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion* as the ultimate source of this fresco.

F16: Joseph comes to the Mother of God

PJ 8:2-9:3

When **she was twelve years old**, there took place a council of the priests saying: 'Behold, Mary has become twelve years old in the Temple of the Lord. What then we do with her, that she may not pollute the sanctuary of the Lord (our God)? And they (the priests) said to the high priest: 'You stand at the altar of the Lord; enter (the sanctuary) and pray concerning her, and what the Lord shall reveal to you will do.' And the high priest took the vestment with the twelve bells and went into the Holy of Holies and prayed concerning her. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before him and said to him: 'Zachariah, Zachariah, go out and assemble the widowers of the people, who shall each bring a rod, and to whomsoever the Lord shall give a miraculous sign, his wife she shall be.' And the heralds went forth and spread out through all the surrounding country of Judea; the trumpet of the Lord sounded, and all ran to it. And Joseph threw down his axe and went out to meet them. And when they were gathered together, they took the rods and went to the high priest. The priest took the rods of all and entered the temple and prayed. When he had finished the prayer, he took the rods and went out and gave them to them: but there was no sign in them. **Joseph received the last rod, and behold, a dove came out from the rod** and flew on to Joseph's head. And the priest said to Joseph 'Joseph, to you has fallen the good fortune to receive the virgin of the Lord; take her under your care.'

³⁴⁸ Holy Apostles Convent, *op.cit.*, p. 173.

Joseph answered him: 'I already have sons, and am old, but she is a girl. I fear lest I should become a laughing-stock to the children of Israel.' And the priest Zachariah said to Joseph 'Fear the Lord your God, and remember all that God did to Korah, and Dathan, and Abiram, how the earth was rent open and they were all swallowed up because of their rebellion. And now fear, Joseph, lest this happen in your house.' And Joseph was afraid, and took her under his care.

S 21 November 21-28 and 26 December 33

²¹From the depths of the unapproachable sanctuary, which she had entered at an age when other children begin to learn, our **Most Holy Lady listened each Sabbath day as the Law and the Prophets** were read to the people assembled in the courts of the Temple. ²²**With her intellect refined by solitude and prayer, she was able to comprehend the depth of the mysteries of Scripture.** ²³Living among the holy things and in contemplating her own purity, she understood what the purpose of God had been throughout the history of His chosen people. ²⁴She understood that all of that time was necessary in order that God might prepare for Himself a mother from out of rebellious humanity, and that she, pure child chosen by God, must become the true living Temple of the Godhead. ²⁵Having her station in the Holy of Holies where the tokens of the divine promise were placed, the Virgin reveled that these figures were to be fulfilled in her person. ²⁶The obscure prophecies become clear in her – the Sanctuary, the Tabernacle of the Word of God, the Ark of the New Covenant, the Vase containing the heavenly manna, Aaron's rod that budded, the Table of the Law of Grace. ²⁷She is the Ladder joining heaven and earth which the Patriarch Jacob saw in a dream; she is the Pillar of cloud that reveals the glory of God; the cloud of dew of the Prophet Isaiah; the uncut Mountain of Daniel; the shut Gate that Ezekiel spoke of sealed, from which the waters of everlasting Life pour forth upon us. ²⁸Contemplating in her spirit these marvels that should take place in her, but still without understanding clearly how they were going to happen, our Most Holy Lady directed her prayer towards the Lord with yet more intensity, begging him not to tarry in fulfilling his promises but to save the human race from death by coming to dwell among men. ³³When in the middle age **he (Joseph)** became a widower, he **was chosen by the high priest, on a sign from God**, to become the protector and guardian of the virginity of Our Lady on her leaving the Temple, where she had dwelt until her twelfth year; and so he appeared in the eyes of everyone to be her lawful husband.

The second fresco on the polygonal column inserted on the *gropnita's* southern wall depicts the meeting between St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary alluded to in both texts. The iconographer titled the fresco *Joseph Comes to the Mother of God*. In Orthodox churches, the illustration of the meeting between Joseph and the Mother of God is never painted in isolation. In other words, it does not have an autonomous life (as, for example

the icons of the major feasts: the *Nativity of the Mother of God* or the *Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple*), but only as part of the series of the life of the Mother of God.

Lafontaine-Dosogne examined the most representative frescoes and manuscripts' miniatures of this theme and concluded that there are several types of representation.³⁴⁹ One is the prayer of St. Zachariah in front of the sanctuary where are placed rods of the widowers who came to the temple for the Virgin. In the same fresco is also illustrated the engagement of St. Joseph to the Virgin. A different representation is that of the scene of the engagement alone. In the majority of depictions, the Virgin Mary is portrayed on a small scale, as in the fresco of the Entrance into the Temple, to emphasize her youthfulness (according to the texts she was twelve when Joseph took her from the Temple), in contrast with St. Joseph, who is constantly represented as an old man. St. Zachariah, when portrayed, gives Joseph his rod. There is a dove that is sometimes believed to come forth from Joseph's rod, while it is also believed to settle on Joseph's head. In other frescoes, as for example the one depicted in the eleventh century at Saint Sophia in Kiev, Sts. Joachim and Anna are also part of the event of betrothal of their daughter. In his *Painter's Manual*, Dionysius of Furna explains how this theme has to be depicted: the Temple and its inside, where St. Zachariah blesses the people; behind him, there should be other priests pointing towards the Virgin Mary; in front of them, St. Joseph carries his flowering rod and takes the Virgin's hand; behind Joseph, there are several people.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie de l'enfance*, vol.1, pp. 168-178.

³⁵⁰ *The Painter's Manual*, p. 336(295). I use the instruction from Dionysius' *Painter's Manual* with caution because it is not known when exactly this manual was put together (in the fifteenth or the sixteenth century) and I cannot say with certainty whether or not the iconographer who painted the church's *gropnita* at Humor Monastery knew it. Anyway, it is known by tradition that the models and canons for the frescoes and icons existed before they were gathered together into a manual by Dionysius of Fournia, and the churches iconographers had access to them.

Nevertheless, the iconographer at the Humor Monastery depicted this theme in a very different manner. The scene is only the meeting between St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary. Joseph is depicted as an old man with a flowering wand in his left hand and pointing towards the Virgin with his right hand. The artist preferred to represent a white flower on top of the wand instead of a dove, as the *Protogospel* has it. Lafontaine-Dosogne holds that the depiction of Joseph with a white flower on top of his wand is influenced by the depiction of the account of Aaron's blooming wand at Numbers 27:16-24.³⁵¹ In her opinion, the author of the *Protogospel* was also influenced by Aaron's story but replaced the flower with a dove to illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit for St. Joseph's election to be the Virgin Mary's protector.³⁵² In Lafontaine-Dosogne's opinion, the iconographers changed the dove back into a flower to show the Old Testament's influence on the *Protogospel* account. We cannot know if the Moldavian iconographer knew that the narration of the election of St. Joseph in the *Protogospel* was influenced by the Old Testament account of Aaron. Anyway, in my opinion, Dosogne's argument of replacing the dove, an image of the Holy Spirit, by a simple flower is not satisfactory. In iconography, the dove as a symbol for the Holy Spirit is depicted only in connection with the other two persons of the Holy Trinity: the Father and the Son. In iconography, there are two images where the dove is depicted, the *Baptism of Jesus Christ* and the *Holy Trinity*. Iconographers in general and the Moldavian iconographer in particular, did not show the dove above Joseph's head probably because they did not want to separate the Holy Spirit from the other two persons of the Holy Trinity. Consequently, they respected the iconographic tradition of painting the dove only in the icons mentioned above.

³⁵¹ Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie de l'enfance*, vol.1, pp. 168-178.

³⁵² Cf. Emile Amann, *Le Protoévangile de Jaques et ses remaniements latins*, Introduction, textes, traduction et commentaires (Paris, France, 1910), pp. 214-215.

In this fresco, the Mother of God is portrayed as an adult in a submissive attitude in her betrothal to St. Joseph, an attitude that is highlighted by the inclination of her head. In front of Mary there is an open book, suggestive of her life of meditation on the Scriptures in her unapproachable sanctuary, from where she heard each Sabbath day the Law and the Prophets read to the people assembled in the court of the Temple, as described in the *Synaxarion*.

On the one hand, the scene of the meeting of the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph is a very simple depiction compared to the detailed narration of the *Protogospel*. On the other hand, the text of the *Synaxarion* emphasizes Marian theology by placing the meeting between Mary and Joseph on the second ground, in contrast with the fresco. Thus, we cannot determine between the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion* as the ultimate source of the fresco, but we can confirm that the iconographer creatively depicted an event narrated in both texts, at the same time considering the iconographical tradition. What is more, the iconographer was probably aware of both texts, the *Synaxarion* for references to the Scriptures and the *Protogospel* for the rod as a sign.

F17: The Visitation

PJ 12:2

And Mary rejoiced, and went to Elizabeth her kinswoman and knocked at the door. When Elizabeth heard it, she put down the scarlet and ran to the door and opened it. And when she saw Mary, she blessed her and said: ‘Whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For behold, that which is in me leaped and blessed the Lord.’ But Mary forgot the mysteries which the archangel Gabriel had told her, and raised a sigh towards heaven and said: ‘Who am I, Lord, that all the women (generations) of the earth count me blessed.’

S 24 June 1-4

¹As soon as the Archangel Gabriel had left the most Holy Mother of God, after having announced the Good News of her virginal childbearing and having referred to her cousin Elisabeth's pregnancy, as a confirmation of his words, Mary went with haste to the village in Judaea where Zachariah and Elizabeth lived. ²She greeted her cousin, and immediately the six-month fetus in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy, making himself the Savior's Forerunner even before his birth. Elizabeth cried aloud: 'Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb! ³And whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?' (Luke 1:39-44). ⁴Mary replied with her wondrous canticle of thanksgiving: 'My soul doth magnify the Lord.' ⁵She remained with Elizabeth for three months, giving her practical help and talking with her about God's wonderful acts; then she returned home.

The last fresco on the column of the *gropnita*'s southern wall is the *Visitation*. The depiction of the meeting between the Mother of God and St. Elisabeth is rare since there is no corresponding celebration for the Visitation in the Orthodox liturgical calendar. However, the episode is referred to in the iconography of the *Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God* and in the series representing the "Life of the Mother of God." The theme is traditionally represented in a simple manner: the Mother of God and St. Elisabeth embracing each other. The fresco of the Visitation at Humor is quite faded and its title is difficult to read.

According to Tradigo, the most ancient representations of this scene, narrated in the Gospel of Luke (1:39-56), the *Synaxarion*, and the *Protogospel*, date from the seventh-century and are mostly wall paintings.³⁵³ André Grabar mentions, in his study on Christian iconography, an even older representation, a sixth-century mosaic at Poret church (Serbia) that shows the embrace of Mary and Elizabeth.³⁵⁴ Tristan holds that the aim of the iconic representation is to underline the importance of St. John the Baptist as the precursor of Jesus Christ, for St. John recognized the Messiah even in his mother's womb, as the

³⁵³ Tradigo, *op.cit.*, p. 104.

³⁵⁴ André Grabar, *Les voies de la création en iconographie chrétienne* (Paris: Champs Arts, 1979), p. 119.

Synaxarion and the *Protogospel* narrate.³⁵⁵ Christ's entrance into St. Elizabeth's house, at the Mother of God's doing, brought to the unborn Baptist prophet gladness at the presence of the Messiah.

In the canon of iconography, the Visitation is one of the rare depictions of women gathered together. This image depicts the meeting of those two saints with poetic intimacy. The Mother of God warmly greets St. Elizabeth who, in turn, hurries to embrace her. Both women are pregnant and St. Elizabeth, the first to do so, proclaims the divinity of the Child that the Virgin carries in her womb (Luke 1:39-56, the *Synaxarion*, and the *Protogospel*). The frescos of the *Annunciation* and of the *Visitation* are images of the same theme of conception. The latter was added to the first witnessing of Christ's conception. In the hands of the iconographer, the fresco of the Visitation acquired the meaning of Christian dogma concerning the Incarnation to which he alluded by means of historical scenes. Concerning the literary source of the fresco, it is again difficult to argue that either the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion* is the sole source for the pictorial narrative of this fresco.

F18: The Nativity of Christ

PJ 17:3-20:3

And they came half the way, and Mary said to Joseph: 'Take me down from the ass, for the child within me pressed me, to come forth.'

And he took her down there and said to her: 'Where shall I take you, and hide your shame? For the place is desert.' And **he found a cave** there and brought her into it, and left her in the care of his sons and went out to **seek for a Hebrew midwife** in the region of Bethlehem.

Now, **I Joseph, was walking about, and yet I did not walk. And I looked up to the vault of heaven, and saw it standing still**, and I looked up to the air and saw the air in amazement, and the birds of heaven remain motionless. And I looked at the earth, and saw

³⁵⁵ FrédéricTristan, translated by Elena Buculei and Ana Bartos, *Primele imagini crestine (The First Christian Images)* (Bucurest, Ro: Editura Meridiane, 2002), p. 242.

a dish placed there and workmen lying round it, with their hands in the dish. But those who chewed did not chew, and those who lifted up anything lifted up nothing, and those who put something to their mouth put nothing to their mouth, but all had their faces turned upwards. And behold, sheep were being driven and yet they did not come forward, but stood still; and the shepherd raised his hand to strike them, with his staff, but his hand remained up. And I looked at the flow of the river, and saw the mouths of the kids over it and they did not drink. And then at once everything went on its course again.

And behold, a woman came down from the mountain and said to me: 'Man where are you going?' And I said: 'I seek a Hebrew midwife.' And she answered me: 'Are you from Israel?' And I said to her: 'Yes.' And she said: 'And who is she who brings forth in the cave?' And I said: 'My betrothed.' And she said to me: 'Is she not your wife?' And I said to her: 'She is Mary who was brought up in the Temple of the Lord, and I received her by lot as my wife.

And she is not my wife but she has conceived from the Holy Spirit.' And the midwife said to him: 'Is this true?' And Joseph said to her: 'Come and see.' And the midwife went with him.

And they went to the place of the cave: and behold a bright cloud overshadowing the cave. And the midwife said: 'My soul is magnified this day, for my eyes have seen wonderful things: for salvation is born unto Israel.' And immediately the cloud disappeared from the cave, and a great light appeared in the cave so that our eyes could not bear it. And by little and little that light withdrew itself until the young child appeared: and it went and took the breast of its mother Mary. And the midwife cried aloud and said: 'How great is this day for me, that I have seen this new sight.' And the midwife came out of the cave and **Salome** met her. And she said to her: 'Salome, Salome, I have a new sight to tell you. A virgin has brought forth, a thing which her nature does not allow.' And Salome said: 'As the Lord my God lives, unless I put forward my finger and test her condition I will not believe that a virgin hath brought forth.'

And the midwife went in and said unto Mary: 'Make yourself ready, for there is no small contention concerning you.' And Salome put forward her finger to test her condition and cried out saying: 'Woe unto my wickedness and my unbelief, for I have tempted the living God, and behold, my hand falls away from me consumed by fire.' And she bowed her knees before the Lord, saying: 'O God of my fathers, remember that I am the seed of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob: make me not a public example to the children of Israel, but restore me to the poor, for you know, Lord, that in thy name I perform my cures, and did receive my hire of thee.' And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before Salome, saying to her: 'Salome, God the Lord has heard your prayer. Stretch out your hand to the child and take him up, and there shall be unto thee salvation and joy.' And Salome came near and took him up, saying: 'I will do him worship, for a great king is born unto Israel.' And behold immediately Salome was healed: and she went forth of the cave justified. And behold, a voice saying: 'Salome, Salome, tell none of the marvels which you have seen, before the child comes to Jerusalem.

And behold, Joseph prepared to go forth to Judaea. And there took place a great tumult in Bethlehem of Judaea; for there came **wise men**, saying: 'Where is he that is born king of the Jews for we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him.' And when Herod heard it he was troubled and sent officers unto the wise men. And he sent for the high priests and questioned them: 'How is it written concerning the Messiah, where he is born?' They say to him: 'In Bethlehem of Judaea: for so it is written.' And he let them go. And he questioned the wise men, saying to them: 'What sign did you see concerning the new-born king? And the wise men said: 'We saw **a very great star** shining among those stars and dimming them so that the stars appeared not: and thereby we knew that **a king was born** for Israel, and we came to **worship him**.' And Herod said: 'Go and seek for him, and if ye find him, tell me, that I also may come and worship him.' And the wise men went forth. And behold, the star which they saw in the east went before them until they come to the cave. And it stood over the head of the cave. And the wise men **saw the young child with Marr, his mother: and they took out of their bag gifts, gold, and frankincense and myrrh**. And **being warned by the angel** that they should not go into Judea, they went to their own country by another way.

S 25 December 1-56

The Nativity according to the Flesh of Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ

¹Caesar Augustus, the first Roman Emperor (30BC-AD14), having made all the peoples of the known world subject to his sole authority, decided, in the height of his power, to take a census of the vast population of the Empire, and he thereby became the unwitting instrument of the realization of God's plan. ²For in bringing together and establishing peace and harmony among the many peoples of the immense Empire, with their diverse customs and languages, he prepared them for the revelation of the One God in three Persons, and thus opened the way for the universal proclamation of the Gospel, in accordance with the divine promise: I shall give thee the nations for thine inheritance (Ps. 2:8). Thus this first census prophetically foretold the enrolment of the elect in the Book of Life (cf. Phil. 4:3; Rev. 21:27).

³The imperial decree reached Palestine when Quirinius was governor of Syria, and occasioned the fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah should be born in the lineage of Judah at Bethlehem, the native city of king David (Mic. 5:2). ⁴For Joseph, who was then with Mary at Nazareth in Galilee, had to be enrolled at Bethlehem, the town of his forefathers, even though the pregnancy was well advanced of her whom all took to be his wife.

⁵On their arrival they found the place crowded with people from all over the country, who like themselves had come for the census. ⁶Unable to find lodging at the inn, they had to shelter for the night outside the town **in a cave** that was used as a cattle shed. ⁷Since Mary felt that the time had come for her to be delivered of her child, Joseph settled her as best he could **in the straw**, close by **the ox and ass** which they found there, and he went out in haste to **look for a midwife**. ⁸On Joseph's way, **he noticed that the whole of nature had suddenly become utterly still** as though seized with astonishment: the birds hung motionless in midair, men and beasts stopped in their tracks, and the waters ceased flowing. ⁹The continuous movement that leads everything from birth to death and

imprisons it in vanity was suspended, for at the moment the Eternal entered within the heart of time. ¹⁰The pre-eternal God became a newborn child. Time and history now took on a new dimension.

¹¹The universal hush did not last, and everything appeared to resume its normal course. Joseph found a midwife who was coming down the mountain. ¹²He told her, on the way to the cave, of her who was about to give birth. ¹³But on reaching the cave they were prevented from entering by a thick cloud which covered it like that on Mount Sinai when God revealed Himself to Moses (Exod.19:16). ¹⁴The woman fell to the ground and cried out: 'My soul has been magnified this day, for my eyes have seen a wonder: a Savior has been born in Israel' the cloud lifted and gave place to a dazzling light which, decreasing little by little, allowed them entrance at last. ¹⁵They were in excess of mind to behold the **All Holy Lady sitting beside the manger** where she had placed **the child which she had wrapped in swaddling clothes**. ¹⁶**Joseph** already knew from the Angel that the Blessed Virgin had conceived the Savior by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and as **he contemplated the little Child lying in the straw, he silently adored the Messiah**, awaited and foretold by his fathers for so many generations. Indeed what could be more amazing than this sight, and how could words express it?

¹⁷The Almighty God and Creator of all things became a lowly weak creature, a little homeless sojourner, yet without ceasing to be divine and uncircumscribed. ¹⁸The Word of God took place upon Himself the heaviness of flesh and, clothing Himself in humanity made of it a royal robe. ¹⁹He who is seated in impassibility upon His heavenly throne, attended by myriads of the heavenly host who glorify Him without cease, accepted to be contained in an obscure, narrow cave, rejected and despised by all. ²⁰He who is of divine nature humbled himself, *emptied himself, taking the form of a servant and being born in the likeness of men.* (Phil.2:7). ²¹He who cannot be touched accepted to be wrapped in swaddling bands in order to release us from sins and to cover with divine glory those who were disgraced. ²²God's only Son, He who is in the bosom of the Father from all eternity, became Son of man and son of the Virgin without ceasing to be God, in order to become the *first-born among many brethren* (Rom.8:29), so granting to men the dignity of adoptive sons of God (John 12:12; Luke 6:35; Gal. 4:4-7). He is laid in a crib and gazed upon by the ox and the ass, whereby the prophecies are fulfilled: *In the midst of two animals thou shalt be known* (Hab 3:2 LXX) and, *The ox knows his Creator and the ass his Master's crib* (Is. 1:3 LXX). ²³He who gives food to all flesh by His providence is laid in the manger of these animals without reason, which symbolize the Jews and the Gentile, in order to heal mankind of its madness, and to reconcile those whom hatred had kept apart (Eph. 2:16) by offering himself for the sustenance of all as the true *Bread of life* (John 6:51). ²⁴Moreover, in this scene, say he holy Fathers, an image of the Church is presented to our contemplation: the crib represents the chalice containing Him who became flesh on this day and gives Himself as food *for the life of the world*: the Virgin is at once His throne and the altar of sacrifice; the cave a temple; the Angels, Joseph and the shepherds serve as deacons and acolytes; and the Lord Himself ministers as High Priest in this divine Liturgy. ²⁵**A countrywoman called Salome** who chanced to pass that way learned from the midwife of the wonder that had taken place, but she did not show the same faith. ²⁶She thought it past belief that a virgin should give birth and, not only that, but remain a virgin after bringing forth her child. ²⁷With an incredulity rather like that of the Apostle Thomas (John 20;25), she dared to extend a shameless hand to the body of the All Holy Virgin.

²⁸Her hand was immediately struck as if with palsy and she cried out: ‘Woe is me for my impiety and unbelief! I have provoked the living God! Look, my hand has been shriveled up as though by fire and is dropping off!’ ²⁹Falling to her knees, she implored the Lord to take pity on her, at which an angel appeared and allowed her to take the Divine Infant in her arms. ³⁰With sincere faith full of the fear of God, she exclaimed: ‘I bow down before Him, for a great King has been born in Israel!’ ³¹She was healed immediately, but the Angel counseled her to keep all these wonders to herself until the Lord should make Himself known in Israel.

The same day (25 December), Memory of the Shepherds, who Saw the Lord

³²Not far from the cave where this astonishing wonder took place, some poor **shepherds** were guarding their flocks on the edge of the Judean wilderness. ³³They were taking it in turn to keep watch by night, when all at once an Angel appeared, and the glory of God covered them with dazzling brightness. ³⁴They were very frightened, but the Angel reassured them, telling them that the babe whom they would see lying in the crib was the Messiah, the Good Shepherd who had come to gather his scattered flock, and the Lord of glory had come on earth to look for the lost sheep. ³⁵Having told them the sign by which they would recognize the child, **the Angel was joined by a great company of the heavenly host singing the praises of God**, and calling upon the ranks of Angels and the men to exult: ‘Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.’ ³⁶In unison with the Angels the whole creation resounds today with a single song of gladness and, in the Name of Jesus, all in highest heaven (namely the Angels), on earth, and under the earth bow down in adoration, and *every tongue proclaims that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father* (Phil.2:10-11).

³⁷After the departure of the Angels, the shepherds set out at once for the stable, taking heart to the Lord. ³⁸On their way back, they made known to everyone whom they met the wonders which, as forerunners of the Apostles, they had just witnessed.

Memory of the Veneration of the Magi

³⁹At that time, **three Magi** from the east arrived in Jerusalem with a magnificent escort, asking after the newborn King, whom they had come to venerate. ⁴⁰Priests and seers from among the pagan worshippers of the sun and the other stars, but nonetheless upright and endowed with wisdom, they investigated the heavenly bodies, not in order to predict the future but to trace the ways of divine Providence; and they studied the secrets of nature in order to come to knowledge of the Truth. ⁴¹Full of these good intentions, they had observed the sudden appearance in the firmament of **a star which, drawing near the earth, shone with so brilliant a light as to be clearly visible even at midday, and which at night outshone every other star.**

⁴²From their knowledge of the sayings of the ancient Prophets, the Magi recalled the Prophecy about Israel pronounced long before by Balaam, the seer who came from Mesopotamia at the request of Balak, the King of Moab: *I see him but not now, I glorify him, but not nigh; a Star shall come forth out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel* (Num. 24:17). ⁴³They deduced that the King who would subdue the nations, the Messiah

awaited by Israel, had appeared, and they made ready for the long journey. ⁴⁴Being the *first-fruits of the Gentiles* and prefiguring the conversion of the peoples far removed from the revelation to Israel, they set out to bring Him worship in advance of the stone-hearted Jews, and as they went, **the star** going before showed them the way.

⁴⁵Strange though it may seem, this luminary was no inanimate light, but one of the angelic powers of heaven which took the form of a star, to conform to the understanding of the Magi, who were accustomed to study the stars for clues to the attainment of knowledge of God. ⁴⁶Unlike the planets that appear to move from East to West this star, which was brighter than the sun, went before them from Persia in the North, southward to Jerusalem, and then disappeared for a while, before leading them to Bethlehem and **stationing itself over the place where the Child lay** (Mt.2:9). ⁴⁷It showed the way to the Magi, as the pillar of fire had shown the way to the people of Israel in the wilderness (Ex. 13:21); and it came down so close to the ground that the cave where the Savior lay was indicated clearly in its light. ⁴⁸These extraordinary happenings, which astrology could not account for, had the effect of driving doubt from the spirit of the Magi and of causing them to lay aside all mistrust so that, even while they were on their way, they gave up the worship of the stars for the adoration of the *Sun of righteousness*, Who has come into the world to shed upon mankind the light of true knowledge of God.

⁴⁹When they reached Jerusalem the star disappeared from their sight. ⁵⁰Not knowing where to go, but believing that the Jews would be eager to recognize their King from on High, they made their way to the place of Herod, the King of Judea, a cruel and depraved man who never hesitated to rid himself of anyone who might be threat to his power. ⁵¹On learning from the magi why they had come, he immediately gathered the scribes and doctors of the Law to find out who the King announced by the Prophets might be. ⁵²The Elders assured him that the Messiah, the Liberator of Israel, was indeed expected at Bethlehem, the native town of King David. ⁵³Then having called the Magi to a private audience, Herod directed them to Bethlehem and asked them to let him know of their return where the newborn King was to be found: *'so that I too may come and do him homage,'* as he alleged (Matt,2:8), while really intending to do Him to death.

⁵⁴As soon as they left Jerusalem, the star appeared once again to the magi and led them to the humble cave. ⁵⁵Entering therein full of joy and holy fear as into the palace of a greatest of Kings, these rich noble travelers from afar cast themselves to the ground before **the Child enthroned in the manger**, and opening the treasures of their hearts, they adored him and offered him rare and precious gifts: gold to honor him as King, incense as befitting God, and myrrh – the aromatic oil used in the burial of the dead – for the Immortal One who was soon to suffer death for our Salvation. ⁵⁶Then warned in a dream of Herod's plan, they returned to their own country by another road, thereby teaching those who have once drawn near to Christ not to return to evil ways.

The fresco of the *Nativity of Christ* is narrated in canonical texts (Matthew 1:18-2:12 and Luke 2:1-20) and in the *Synaxarion*, and it is the last event to be described in the *Protogospel*. In Orthodox iconography, there are two traditional models for the feast of the *Nativity of Christ* in relation to the posture of the *Theotokos* and of the place of St. Joseph.

The first model depicts the Mother of God kneeling alongside St. Joseph, both adoring the new born Child. The second model depicts the Mother of God recumbent in the middle of the icon and St. Joseph in a bottom corner overwhelmed by doubts – this second model is the one depicted at Humor. In the corner of the second model, opposite to Joseph’s place, there are usually depicted the two midwives mentioned in the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion*. The star is mentioned in both the *Synaxarion* and the *Protogospel* and is depicted in the center of the upper side of the fresco. Both texts report that the magi saw the star and came to worship the newborn king of the Jews, but the *Synaxarion* specifies three magi who are also depicted in the fresco. Opposite the magi offering their gifts to the newborn, on the upper right side, are two angels with their hands covered - a sign of their reverence for the child – a detail mentioned in the *Synaxarion*. The *Protogospel* also speaks of an angel who warned the magi to return to their country without telling Herod where they found the baby, but it does not refer to the heavenly hosts singing the praises of God as does the *Synaxarion* and the fresco. There is also a shepherd singing to the child, a transposition in the fresco of the meeting between the angel and the shepherds, and their worship of the Lord, narrated only in the *Synaxarion*.

In the fresco, the manger is a cave as the *Protogospel* has it. But, beside the manger where the baby Jesus lies down in swaddling clothes, there is an ox and a donkey, as in the *Synaxarion*. The scene of the ox and donkey depicted in every icon of the Nativity is seen by theologians not as an influence from the *Synaxarion*, but rather as a depiction of the words of the prophet Isaiah: “the ox knows his owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know Me, and the people do not understand Me.” (Isaiah 1:3).³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ Leonide Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982), p. 159.

The fresco does not have St. Joseph adoring the child Messiah as the *Synaxarion* mentions and as is represented in many other Nativity icons. Rather, it depicts him in the bottom left corner speaking with an old man. Leonid Ouspensky and Paul Evdokimov write that this tradition, transmitted also by the apocrypha, relates that Joseph speaks with Satan, the latter depicted in the fresco as an old shepherd, who came to tell Joseph that it is impossible for a child to be born of a virgin.³⁵⁷ Other iconic representations depict the old shepherd as having a tail, indeed an indication of the presence of Satan. St. Joseph might be overwhelmed not only because of Satan's words, but also because he experienced time standing still when Jesus Christ was born, as narrated in both the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion*.

Symmetrical with the place occupied by St. Joseph is the scene of the ablution of the infant Jesus. Although the midwives are presented in both the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion*, their presence in iconography was seen as a proof of the influence of the apocrypha on iconography.³⁵⁸ Again we cannot affirm that only the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion* was the literary source for the fresco. However, we can affirm that, for the *Nativity of Christ*, being one of the major feasts of the Orthodox Church, the iconographer followed one of the traditional iconic models for its depiction.

The next fresco of the life of the Mother of God, is the *Synaxis* (Greek: assembly, synod) of the *Mother of God*, presented below.

³⁵⁷ Ouspensky and Lossky, *op.cit.*, p. 160; and Evdokimov, *op.cit.*, p. 284. Neither Ouspensky nor Evdokimov mention the name of the apocryphon describing the scene of Joseph speaking with Satan. I did not find an account of this discussion in any of the Infancy Gospels. See: Schneemelcher and Wilson, eds., *New Testament Apocrypha*, pp. 414-470.

³⁵⁸ Ouspensky and Lossky, *op.cit.*, p. 160; David R. Cartlidge and J. Keith Elliot, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha*, (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2001), p. 90.

F19: The Synaxis of the Mother of God

Synaxarion 26 December 1-15

¹Yesterday (25 December), together with the Angels, the Magi and the shepherds, we offered our worship to God made man, and born a little child for our Salvation; and today (26 December) we pay homage to His Mother, the Holy Virgin Mary. ²The Church sets her before us in the cave beside her Son as the *new Eve*, the first and pre-eminent representative of the renewed human race. Chose and prepared by God throughout all generation, for the fulfilment of the *Great Mystery* of His Incarnation.

³It has pleased God to appear among men in a manner beyond the grasp of our understanding. ⁴The Only Son of God, born from all eternity of the Father without forthgoing or division, is conceived in the womb of the Virgin without participation of a man, through the working of the Holy Spirit, and He submits voluntarily to the ordinances of the Law touching birth and growth, at the same time as renewing them. ⁵Without going forth from His nature, but still abiding in the bosom of the Father, He takes human nature upon Himself and becomes the only son of the Virgin, weaving in her womb the purple robe of His body. ⁶There are two births, the one divine and eternal, the other human and subject to time; but one only Son, the Word of God made man. ⁷One only Person was born of her, the God-man (*Theanthropos*) – without mother as regards His divine nature and without father as regards his human nature. The properties of the divine nature and human nature – hitherto separated by an impassable gulf – are so closely conjoined in Him that they interchange without confusing in an ineffable manner. ⁸Just as iron plunged into fire imparts its solidity to the fire at the same time as the heat and light of the fire pass into the iron, likewise here, the Deity voluntarily submits to the weakness of the flesh, and humanity is clothed with glory of God, so that we can extol our Most Holy Lady as, in very truth, MOTHER OF GOD (*Theotokos*). ⁹The little child lying in the crib is in fact not a simple man foreordained to receive divine grace as a reward for his virtues, not just one God's elect like the Saints and the Prophets or even a Godbearing man; but He is truly the Word, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, who assumed human nature that He might in Himself renew and recreate humanity by restoring within it the image of God that sin has tarnished and deformed.

¹⁰The Mother of God has become more glorious than the Cherubim and the Seraphim and all heavenly host, for she is the spiritual Paradise of the Second Adam, the Temple of the Godhead, the Bridge that links earth to Heaven, the Ladder by which God has come down to earth and by which man has ascended to Heaven; and in sheltering Christ her womb has become the throne of God and her bosom has been made *broader than the heavens*.

¹¹Thanks to her, man is raised higher than the Angels and the glory of the Deity shines in his body. In face of such a mystery the human spirit, grown dizzy, would rather bow down in silence and faith, for where God wills, the order of human nature is overcome. ¹²Like Joseph the Silent, illumined by the unwonted light shining in the darkness of the cave, our spirit contemplates the All Holy Lady seated peacefully and radiant beside the Child whom

she herself has wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the crib. ¹³There was no trace in her of the pains of childbirth nor of the consequent exhaustion felt by other women; for, as was fitting, virgin of soul and body, she did not conceive in pleasure and so she gave birth without pain. ¹⁴Virgin before conception, virgin in giving birth and ever-virgin after Saviour's birth, she thus makes known to women the joy of deliverance from the curse pronounced on Eve, the first mother, on the day of the transgression (Gen.:3:16). ¹⁵A new way of living has been opened to human nature; for just as God has chosen virginity in order to be born corporeally into this world, likewise it is through virginity that He wishes to appear and to grow spiritually in the soul of every Christian who orders his life after the example given by the Mother of God.

The image of the *Synaxis of the Mother of God*, also called *Mother of God Enthroned*, is connected with the Orthodox calendar of 26 December, the day dedicated to the celebration of the Mother of God, following December 25, the *Nativity of Christ*. The fresco has as its literary source the *Synaxarion* text. It is the iconic depiction of Orthodox Mariology and the sermons of the Church Fathers that honour the Mother of God, as summarised in the *Synaxarion*.

F20: The Flight into Egypt

S 26 December 16-27

¹⁶After the departure of the Magi, an Angel appeared once again to Saint Joseph. ¹⁷He made known to him that King Herod was soon going to send soldiers into the district to look for the Child to kill Him, and he urged him to flee (Matt. 2:13). Without more ado, Joseph gathered up their few belongings, and placed Mary and the Child on a donkey; then the Holy Family set off by night on the long, wearying road to Egypt, the time-honoured refuge of persecuted Jews.

¹⁸Neither Herod's soldiers nor any worldly power could hold any dread for the Saviour in his divinity; but having, by His Incarnation, taken upon Himself our human nature in all its weakness and vulnerability, it was His will to keep his sovereign power hidden and withdrawn, and He refused to work miracles until the beginning of his public ministry on the day of His Baptism by John. ¹⁹The Maker of heaven and earth, who is ministered to by the angelic hosts, flees danger today, clasped in the arms of the Blessed Virgin, enduring the heat and weariness of the road, the very image of the humility and renunciation, in order to make plain to all that He has become man in truth, and not by illusion as some heretics suppose. ²⁰Thus from the beginning of His earthly life, Christ deigns not only to

suffer hunger and thirst, cold and all the other ills our flesh is heir to, but he also experiences persecution and exile, in order that His future disciples may, from his example, learn to encounter with joy the tribulation they will meet with in their turn.

²¹Moreover the land of Egypt, mother of every superstition and idolatrous cult, symbol of the passion and sin, and country of Pharaoh who imaged the Devil, was the Lord's chosen place of refuge in order to fulfil the prophecy: *Out of Egypt I have called my Son* (Hos. 11:1); which announced in a veiled manner that He has come into the world to put an end to idolatry and to bring mankind to knowledge of the Truth.

²²According to legend, on the road which brought the Child to Egypt, unreasoning nature recognized God hidden in human form, and worshipped Him whom mankind, blinded by passions, could not see. ²³It is said that the Holy Family was escorted by lions who, lamblike, frisked around and played with the beasts of burden and domestic animals that they had with them, in order to fulfil the prophesy of Isaiah: *The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox* (62:25). ²⁴One day the Divine Child commanded a date palm to bend to the ground in order to offer its fruit to the Mother of God; when at Jesus' word it had stood upright again, a spring of fresh, clear water gushed from its roots to quench their thirst. ²⁵And nature all around them, as though made new, resumed the state of earthly Paradise. ²⁶On reaching a town called Satin in the region of Hermopolis, Jesus and his parents went into a huge temple where there was an idol for every day of the year. ²⁷All of them fell to the ground and were dashed to pieces when the Virgin appeared, carrying in her arms God, the Way, the Truth and the Life, in fulfilment of the prophecy: *Behold the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them* (Is.19:1).

The account of the *Flight into Egypt* in the *Synaxarion* is based mainly on the Gospel according to Matthew (Mt.2:13-23). Therefore, this image belongs to the depiction of the Gospels painted in the churches' nave and is never depicted in the churches' narthex, a place that is usually reserved for the representation of the *Synaxarion* for the entire year.³⁵⁹ Its presence in the *gropnita*, alongside the fresco of the *Return of the Holy Family from Egypt*, might be the prelude to the nave's frescoes where the Gospels are depicted, or simply the depiction of the *Synaxarion* for December 26. In the fresco, the Mother of God

³⁵⁹ Regarding the saints that have been, or that can be, painted on the frescoes for the month of December, see: *The Painter's Manual*, pp. 359 (318)-385(345).

has the Christ Child on her lap, while St. Joseph leads the donkey upon which she is seated. Joseph is portrayed without a halo, but on his right shoulder there is a yellow ribbon, which in iconography is reserved for Christ. The ribbon on Joseph's shoulder signifies that he is loved and esteemed by believers for serving and taking care of the Mother of God and her Son.

Behind St. Joseph is depicted St. James, his son.³⁶⁰ St. James is mentioned in the *Synaxarion* (S 26 December – St. Joseph the Betrothed 32) among the seven children Joseph had from his first marriage, but not as a companion in the flight into Egypt. The Moldavian iconographer chose to depict James, the presumed author of the *Protogospel of James*, alongside the Holy Family, although there are traditional models of the image where James is not depicted. The depiction of James might be a consequence of the respect the iconographer had for him as the possible author of the *Protogospel*, which was one of the major sources for this fresco series.

F21: The Return from Egypt

S 26 December 28-30

²⁸**With the removal of danger upon Herod's death several** months after their arrival in Egypt, an Angel of God again appeared to Joseph and instructed him to return to Palestine (Mt.2:19). ²⁹Rather than stay in Bethlehem, too close to Jerusalem, where Herod's ruthless and tyrannical son Archelaüs was in power, Joseph was told to make his way to Galilee, and settled in the small town of Nazareth. ³⁰Thus was fulfilled another word of the Prophets: He shall be called a Nazarene (Mt. 2:23).

The account of the *Return from Egypt* in the *Synaxarion* is based on the Gospel of St. Matthew (Mt.2:13-23), but St. James, depicted in the fresco, is not mentioned in the

³⁶⁰ The apocryphal sources speak about Joseph's sons and their name. See: Paul A. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, vol.1, *Historical Introduction and Description of the Mosaics and Frescoes* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1966), p. 97.

Gospel. Similar to the *Flight into Egypt*, its depiction belongs to the churches' nave where the Gospels are illustrated and the presence of the fresco in the *gropnita* might be the prologue of the frescoes in the nave or, as mentioned above, the depiction of the *Synaxarion* 26 December when the Flight into Egypt and the Return of the Holy Family from Egypt are celebrated.

The image of the *Return from Egypt* is similar to that of the *Flight into Egypt*. The most important difference is Christ's place, which in the Flight fresco is in his mother's lap, whereas in the second fresco Joseph carries the Christ Child on his shoulder. Although Joseph was in his eighties during the journey to Egypt, an age when most men have entered a stage in life of retirement and reflection, he took good care of the Mother of God and of her child.³⁶¹ This is alluded to in the fresco by the depiction of the Christ Child on Joseph's shoulder.

After the frescoes illustrating the travels of the Holy Family, there is depicted the *Anapeson* (Christ reposes), which I will present next.

F22: The Anapeson

Next to the frescoes of the *Return from Egypt* is depicted Christ as "reposing" (*Anapeson*). The *Anapeson* is a rare image and its literary source is neither the *Synaxarion*, nor the *Protogospel*. According to Ecaterina Buculei, this fresco is based on Genesis 49:9, which reads as follows: "He bows down, and slept as a lion and a cub; And who shall rouse him?" and on its liturgical paraphrase: the lion, when sleeping, keeps his eyes open as Christ, who sleeps as man, is awake as God. This is an allegory of the death and

³⁶¹ Holy Apostles Convent, *op.cit.*, p. 226. Note that in iconography in general and in the frescoes of the monastic church at Humor, Joseph is depicted as an old man.

resurrection of Christ.³⁶² The *Anapeson* is present in several Greek and Balkan churches starting in the thirteenth century, having as model the image painted by Manuel Panselinos at Protaton monastery on Mount Athos.³⁶³ Although depicted in several Athonite monasteries, the *Anapeson* was not included in the classical *Painter's Manual* of Dionysius of Fournà. To my knowledge, this image is never depicted in modern Romanian churches and was represented only in churches erected in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The fresco has the Christ Child partially lying down on a pallet, his body reclining towards the right and his head leaning on his right hand. He is flanked by an angel holding the instruments of his future Passion and by the Mother of God pointing her right hand towards Christ. Beyond the Mother of God is the prophet Isaiah, whose presence reminds us of his prophecies concerning the birth of Christ.

Beside the rows of frescoes described above, there are two other frescoes placed on the left and right sides of the *gropnita*'s window (northern wall) and they will be presented below.

F23: The Prayer of the Mother of God on the Mount of Olives

This very rare image in Orthodox iconography, placed on the left side of the *gropnita*'s window, does not have as literary source either the *Synaxarion* or the *Protogospel*, but, as Nicolae Cartoian suggests, the apocryphon entitled the *Apocalypse of the Holy Mother of God*.³⁶⁴ The oldest written source of this apocryphon came to us in the

³⁶² Buculei, "Programul iconographic al gropnitelor moldovenesti", p. 90.

³⁶³ Branislav Todic, "Anapeson. Iconographie et signification du thème," *Byzantion* vol. 64, (1994), p. 134.

³⁶⁴ Nicolae Cartoian, *Cartile populare in literatura romaneasca. Epoca influenței sud slave* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Enciclopedica Romana, 1974), vol.1, pp. 93-103. For information concerning the texts of the Apocalypses of the Virgin Mary, see: Richard Bauckham, "The Four Apocalypses of the Virgin Mary," in *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 1998, pp. 332-362.

Codex Sturdzanus, copied in 1580 from an older lost Romanian manuscript.³⁶⁵ The apocryphon describes the desire of the Mother of God to enter Hades to help those who suffer, as well as her journey towards Hades. Before her journey, she went on the Mount of Olives and prayed to her Son to send Archangel Michael as her guide. She entered Hades and saw the torments of the condemned souls. From the time of her return from Hades until the end of days, she unceasingly prays for condemned souls. Thanks to her intercession, sinners obtain access to Paradise between Holy Friday (i.e. the Friday before Easter) and All Saints' Sunday (first Sunday after Pentecost).³⁶⁶ This apocryphon had a great influence in Moldavia. Hence it was and still is widely believed that the Mother of God will help those who suffer in Hades at the Last Judgment.

In the church of Humor monastery, Mary is depicted in prayer, not only in relation to her mediation on behalf of the souls of the dead, but possibly to stress that, through the intercession of her prayers, Moldavia will be protected from Ottoman occupation.

F24: Joachim Gave a Sacrifice to the Temple

PJ 5:1

But the next day (after his return from the wilderness) Joachim offered his gifts, saying in himself: 'If the Lord God has been rendered gracious to me, the plate on the priest's forehead will make it manifest to me. And Joachim offered his gifts, and observed the priest's frontlet when he went up to the altar of the Lord; and he saw no sin in himself. And he said 'Now I know that the Lord God is gracious to me, and has forgiven all my sins.' And he went down from the temple of the Lord justified, and went to his house.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵Codex Sturdzanus is a miscellaneous collection with texts from the sixteenth century preserved at the Library of the Romanian Academy with the code: ms. rom. 447.

³⁶⁶ Buculei, "Programul iconographic al gropnitelor moldovenesti," p. 91.

³⁶⁷ Schneemelcher and Wilson, eds., *op.cit.*, p. 428.

The last fresco belonging to the series depicting the “Life of the Mother of God,” placed on the wall of the *gropnita*’s window, is entitled *Joachim Gave a Sacrifice to the Temple* and illustrates the story of the accepted gifts narrated solely in the *Protogospel*.

Representation of this event is very rare. In her extensive research on the representation of the Virgin’s childhood in the Eastern and Western Churches, Lafontaine-Dosogne could only find four such representations: first on one column of the altar’s baldachin at Saint Mark’s church in Venice, Italy; second at Peribleptos of Mistra’s monastery; and third on two Russian epitaphs embroidered in the fifteenth century.³⁶⁸ The Moldavian iconographer illustrated Sts. Joachim and Anna, although the *Protogospel* mentions that only Joachim presented his gifts to the Temple.

The *Protogospel* indicates that, although an angel told Joachim in the wilderness that he will have a child, after his return home he needed reassurances that the message would come true. Subsequently, when he went to the Temple the second time with his offering, he asked God to let him see a particular plate placed in the altar. The *Protogospel* suggests that seeing the words on the plate was reserved exclusively to those cleansed of their sins.³⁶⁹ For the iconographer, it was not important that this episode be depicted since the Christian assumption is that one cleanses oneself from sins not by seeing the vessels from the altar, but by sincere repentance. For the iconographer, it was more important that Joachim’s sacrificial gifts were accepted. He chose to depict it together with the refused gifts. The same priest wearing the same liturgical vestments stands to the extreme left holding his left hand open to receive Joachim’s gift; with his right hand, he blesses Joachim

³⁶⁸ In her book, Lafontaine-Dosogne states that (as far as she knows) these are the only representations of this theme. Apparently, she was not aware that the church of Humor monastery has this theme depicted on the crypt. Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, *op. cit.*, vol.1, p. 88-89.

³⁶⁹ Erik Peterson, *Frühkirche, Judentum und Gnosis. Studien und Untersuchungen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1959), p. 351.

and Anna who bow before him. The detail of the priest's left hand shows the viewer that, this time, the gifts are accepted. The hand, opened horizontally, means that the hand can hold the gifts, in contrast to the priest's open left hand slightly inclined toward the ground, in the fresco of the refused gifts. Joachim, with covered hands, holds out his offering, a lamb, whereas Anna has her hands open and pointing towards the Virgin Mary, who is portrayed in miniature standing with her back to the priest. Her presence in the fresco probably indicates that she is the reason why Joachim's sacrifices were accepted.

Anna's presence at the Temple is connected with her presence in the fresco of the refused gifts. She was present at the Temple when her husband's gifts were refused, and she is present again at the Temple next to her husband when his gifts are accepted. Anna's servant Judith is also portrayed in semi-profile, behind the couple. She does not have a halo, as the other persons do, because she reproached Anna's barrenness (before Anna's prayers were fulfilled by God) (*Protogospel* 2:3). The iconographer isolates this fresco from the rest of the frescoes picturing the "Life of the Mother of God," highlighting that, from the moment of Mary's conception, Joachim's gifts were accepted in the Temple.

5.9. Conclusion

The traditional way of analyzing icons is to show that they are based on canonical writings. Lafontaine-Dosogne's extensive research on the series of the Virgin's life in the Eastern Churches, and David Cartlidge and Keith Elliot in their research on art and the Christian apocrypha, arrived at the conclusion that the depiction of the Virgin's life has as major and ultimate source of inspiration the *Protogospel of James*.³⁷⁰ On the other hand,

³⁷⁰ Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'Empire byzantin et en Occident*, Bruxelles: Palais des Académies, 1964-1965, vol.1 pp. 185-196; David R. Cartlidge and J. Keith Elliot, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha* (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2001), pp. 23-26.

my research has shown in this chapter that in the *gropnita* of the monastic church at Humor, the series of frescoes depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” is very original and that it is related to the *Protogospel of James*, to the *Synaxarion*, and to other canonical and apocryphal sources.

The iconographer divided his pictorial narration into two main sections, starting on the eastern wall, going towards the western wall, passing the southern walls and finishing on the northern wall. The first section includes the frescoes depicting the history of Mary’s parents and her childhood, whereas the second section illustrates the life of Mary starting with her entrance into the Temple and her life after she left the Temple.

The fresco series starts with the fresco of the *Tabernacle of the Old Testament of the Jews*, which does not have as its literary source either the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion*. Nevertheless, there are frescoes depicting events described only in the *Protogospel* and not in the *Synaxarion*: *the Kiss of Joachim and Anna*; *the Annunciation* variant narrated only in the *Protogospel*; *Joseph Questioning Mary*; *A Test about Christ’s Incarnation*; *Joachim Gave a Sacrifice to the Temple*. There are also frescoes which could be seen as depictions of either the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion*, such as the frescoes *Joachim in the Wilderness*, *Anna’s Prayer* and the *Priests’ Blessing*, yet they have depicted details described exclusively in the *Protogospel*: the two messengers in the fresco of *Joachim in the Wilderness*; the laurel tree in the fresco of *Anna’s Prayer*; the chief priests in the fresco of *Priests’ Blessing*.

The Moldavian iconographer chose to depict the great feasts of *the Nativity of the Mother of God*, *the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple*, and *the Nativity of Christ* as they are traditionally depicted in the Orthodox Church. Yet, he chose to depict the

Annunciation, another great feast, as it is narrated only in the *Protogospel*, not as it is traditionally depicted on the walls or iconostases of other churches. However, the *Protogospel* is not the exclusive source for the frescoes because the narrative of the *Protogospel*, in contrast with the series of frescoes, finishes with the Nativity of Christ. The iconographer chose to extend the series of frescoes by depicting the *Synaxis of the Mother of God*, after the day of the *Nativity of Christ*. This was done because the Orthodox Church celebrates the Virgin Mary after the birth of Christ, as mentioned in the *Synaxarion*, and to show that the one whose life was depicted earlier is truly the Mother of God. The frescoes entitled, the *Flight into Egypt* and the *Return from Egypt*, as described in the *Synaxarion* and commemorated on 26 December, the same day as the *Synaxis of the Mother of God*, are the next frescoes of the series. Although the frescoes have the *Synaxarion* as their literary source, there is also depicted St. James, the presumed author of the *Protogospel*. The iconographer depicted St. James in these two frescoes, probably to show that he is the author of the book which was one of the sources for the fresco series depicting the “Life of the Mother of God”. It would not be the first time that Moldavian iconographers paint the author of the books they depict in frescoes. For example, the fresco of the *Last Judgment* on Moldavian churches is not depicted as it is described in the New Testament but as it is narrated in the apocalyptic *Vision* of Niphon, Bishop of Constantiana (fourth century). The iconographers depicted Niphon at the bottom left side of the fresco to specify the identity of the author of the book they depicted.

Even though the *Synaxarion* influenced the iconographer, it was not the major source for the fresco series, especially because the *Dormition of the Mother of God* is not depicted. If the *Synaxarion* were the main literary source of the frescoes, the absence of

this fresco is inexplicable. This omission is significant since the *Dormition of the Mother of God* is a great feast of the Orthodox Church (15 August), and especially because it is the dedication day of the church of Humor Monastery.

The iconographer chose a variety of sources for the series of frescoes. Thus, the *Anapeton* (Christ “reposing”), the last fresco on the western wall, is a depiction of Genesis 49:9, whereas the *Prayer of the Mother of God on the Mount of Olives* is a depiction from the apocryphon *Apocalypse of the Holy Mother of God*. The final fresco of the fresco series is the *Accepted Gifts of Joachim and Anna*, an original depiction of the account of the accepted gifts from the *Protogospel*.

As one can see, the iconographer did not hesitate to use narratives from the canonical writings as well as narratives from the apocryphal writings, the *Protogospel of James* being used extensively. Different *Synaxaria* describe the lives of saints in Greek or Slavonic and existed in all sixteenth century Moldavian churches. There are many manuscripts which survived until today, the most important of which are preserved at the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest. Yet, the case for the *Protogospel* is slightly more complicated. It is well known that, throughout the world, there are not many copies of the *Protogospel* dated before the sixteenth century.³⁷¹ Since the names of the frescoes are in Slavonic, one might think that the iconographer used a Slavonic manuscript of the *Protogospel* as a source of inspiration for the frescoes. In Romania, there is one Slavonic copy of the *Protogospel*, Manuscript no. 357, from 1789, dated more than 200

³⁷¹ Wilhelm Schneemelcher and R. McL. Wilson, eds., *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. I. (Cambridge, UK: J. Clarke, 1991), p. 421; Boyd L. Daniels, *The Greek Manuscript Tradition of the Protoevangelium Jacobi* (s.l.: s.n., 1956, microfilm), p. 32.

years after the frescoes were painted.³⁷² Moreover, in the Library of the Romanian Academy, there is a Greek manuscript of the *Protogospel* probably written in an Athonite monastery (Greece), dated 1399 and part of the miscellaneous no. 377/595.³⁷³ Although Gabriela Dumitrescu, director of the Romanian Department of *Manuscripts* and Rare Books, *Library of Romanian Academy*, holds that the manuscript was brought into Romania immediately after it was written, traces of the places where the manuscript was before 1688 are impossible to establish.³⁷⁴

The Greek manuscript might have been the literary source of the fresco series depicting the “Life of the Mother of God,” but I cannot prove it conclusively. However, I can confirm that the “Life of the Mother of God,” based on the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion*, is depicted in Moldavia only in the church of Humor Monastery. The Moldavian iconographers, most probably literate monks, knew Greek well, since fresco restorers observed that Slavonic inscriptions in frescoes were written over their initial Greek titles.³⁷⁵ Moreover, abbot Paisie of Humor Monastery, Prince Rares’ counsellor and spiritual father, brought instructors of Greek and Slavonic into the monastic school to teach the two languages, not only to the monks, but also to Moldavian parish priests.³⁷⁶

‘Originality’ is the word which characterizes, not only the frescoes of the *gropnita*, but the entire church’s program. The interior and exterior frescoes of the Moldavian churches painted during the reign of Prince Rares, especially of the church of Humor Monastery, are unique in the Eastern Orthodox world. To mention three of them: the

³⁷² Ioan Radu Mircea, *Répertoire des manuscrits slaves en Roumanie : auteurs byzantins et slaves* (Sofia : Institut d’études balkaniques, 2005), p. 81.

³⁷³ Constantin Litzica, *Catalogul Manuscriselor Grecesti (The Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts)* (Bucharest, Romania: Editiunea Academiei Romane, 1909), p. 275.

³⁷⁴ For more details concerning the Misc. 377/595, and the photos of the *Protogospel*, see Appendix 3.

³⁷⁵ Constantin Ciobanu, “Simetira « ascunsa » a Acatistului de la Arbore,” *Akademos*, 4 (2010), p. 57.

³⁷⁶ Ioanichie Balan, *Romanian Patericon*, vol. 1 Third-Eighteenth Centuries (Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996), p. 273.

Apocalypse, on the exterior walls, is depicted not as it is described in the New Testament, but as it is narrated in the *Vision* of Nifon from Constantiana. *The Tree of Jesse*, another exterior fresco, a large composition including more than one hundred characters (kings, Messianic prophets, tribal rulers), has on its lower part Jesse, King David's father, surrounded by ancient philosophers. Another original depiction is the *Akathystos Hymn to the Mother of God*, where the battle for Constantinople was painted as a Moldavian victory over the Ottoman Turks.

In all these frescoes, alongside the frescoes from the *gropnita*, the Mother of God has a very important place. She was believed to be the major intercessor, not only for the things people hoped to receive in their earthly life, but also for the salvation of the souls of the dead. Therefore, her intercession before the throne of God was fervently petitioned.

In the next chapter, I will analyze the theology of the fresco series in the *gropnita* and examine whether there is any connection between the fresco series and Prince Rares' political ambitions.

6. THE THEOLOGY OF THE FRESCOES NARRATING THE LIFE OF THE MOTHER OF GOD IN THE *GROPNITA* OF THE MONASTIC CURCH

6.1. Introduction

Chapter five analyzed the transposition of the literary sources into the frescoes depicting the “Life of the Mother of God,” placed in the *gropnita* of the church of Humor Monastery. Yet, as Valerii Lepakhin describes in his methodology of shifting from the written to the painted medium, the task of the iconographer is not only one of transferring written texts to images, but one of communicating, through frescoes, the theology of the Orthodox Church, and this through the use of iconographical symbols, techniques and specific colors. Using these painterly techniques, the iconographer aims at the *transfiguration* of the text into a ‘theology in color.’ The *imposition* of the written text in providing a title, as well as writing different texts on the parchments or on the books held by saints, emphasizes the links between the written and pictorial forms of communication.³⁷⁷ The texts imposed on the icons are usually citations from the sacred writings or the liturgical texts, or from a portion of the sermons of the saints that are represented.

Chapter six will present the theology of the entire fresco series depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” and, later, will unfold the theology of each fresco by deciphering the symbols, techniques, colors, and written texts used by the iconographer. This chapter will pose the following questions: What Marian teachings are highlighted in the fresco series? What is the broader theological context of the Marian theological program in the *gropnita* frescoes? Is there any allusion to Prince Rares’ political ambitions inserted into the fresco series?

³⁷⁷ In Lepakhin’s methodology, the *imposition* of the written text onto the icon is another method which iconographer use to express Orthodox theology.

In striving to articulate the Orthodox theology of the frescoes, the study will draw upon Orthodox theology in general and, in particular, on the theology of icons written by contemporary theologians and scholars such as Leonid Ouspensky, Michel Quenot, Gaetano Passarelli, Vladimir Lossky, and Alexander Schmemmann, and by ancient theologians such as St. John Damascene (d.749) and Dyonisius of Furna (d.1744). The goal of this chapter is not only to discuss the theology of the frescoes by analogy to similar images analyzed by the theologians mentioned, but to discover the particular perspective of the messages which the Moldavian iconographer wanted to transmit to viewers who encounter the vivid narrative inscribed on the walls of the *gropnita* of the church at Humor.

6.2. An Overview of the Marian Theology of the Frescoes Composing the Life of the Mother of God

The central theme of Christian theology is the coming of the Son of God into human history, i.e. the Incarnation. One of the most profound artistic renditions of the Christian revelation is the magnificent series of frescoes of the interior and exterior walls of the church of Humor Monastery. These reveal the Nativity of Christ, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection alongside the lives and prayers of saints who loved and worshiped him, or who were martyred for his sake. This holistic fresco program is a powerful and vivid reflection on the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection, the central themes of Christian faith, liturgy and spirituality.

In itself the *gropnita*'s fresco series depicting the "Life of the Mother of God" does not attempt such a synthesis of the unity and complexity of Christian theology. The iconographer of the Humor *gropnita* focuses on the Virgin's role in the Incarnation, in particular, the aspects of Marian theology associated with significant moments in her

infancy (F7, F8), her early childhood (F9, F10), her presentation in the Temple (F11), and then a number of aspects of her meeting with St. Joseph (F13, F16), the Annunciation through the Archangel Gabriel of her role in salvation history as the Bearer of the divine Savior (F12), the birth of Christ (F18), the flight to Egypt to escape Herod's murderous plan to slay the Savior (F20), and the return to the Holy Land (F21). The fresco series continues with the Mother of God's prayer (F23), and, at the end, it returns to the opening narratives, now dramatically reversed, where the virtuous lifestyle of the holy parents of the Virgin Mary is seen to point to the wondrous role of their daughter, who was born to them in their old age. The birth of Mary was not only a joy to her parents and an evidence of the acceptance of their offerings to the Temple (F24), but it was a joy to the whole human family, including St. Elisabeth (F 17), who declared the Mother of God to be blessed among women (Luke 1:42).

6.2.1. Divine Reversals in Salvation History

The fresco's emphasis on the infancy and motherhood of the Virgin Mary gave the iconographer an opportunity to explore and explicitly reflect upon specific themes concerning the role of the Mother of God in salvation history and other aspects of Marian theology, such as her role in Orthodoxy as the archetype of humankind. Because the iconographer who painted the frescoes kept his unwavering attention on the infancy narratives of the canonical Gospels together with the rich source material of the Tradition associated with the childhood of the Virgin Mary and the incarnation of God, he can explore more intently one of the constant themes of salvation history throughout the Old

and New Testaments, namely the mysterious ‘reversal’ that erupts into history announcing the ongoing divine presence in the unfolding of the human story itself.

Weak and despised men and women became heroes and heroines for their people, younger sons became the inheritors, the young boy with the sling triumphs over the renowned warrior, and, above all, an elderly barren woman bears a child who, time and time again (e.g. Isaac born of Sarah, Samuel of Hannah, St. John the Baptist of St. Elisabeth, the Virgin Mary of St. Anna), ends up playing a significant role in salvation history. This theological theme of the divine reversals is central to the narrative structure of the fresco series in the *gropnita* of the church at Humor Monastery.

6.2.2. The ‘Reversals’ in the Frescoes of the *Life of the Mother of God*

There are three major ‘reversals’ of expectations in the narrative as designed by the *gropnita* iconographer: the change from barrenness to the fruitfulness of parenthood, a Virgin giving birth to a child, and the Incarnation of God. The first ‘reversal’ is concerned with the ritual of gift offering by the priest at the altar of sacrifice in the Temple of Jerusalem. This is depicted in F1 and F2, where, to the dismay of St. Joachim, the High Priest (St. Zachariah) refused his gifts, a refusal that demonstrates Joachim’s unworthiness to present these, since he and Anna did not yet have any children. The concluding fresco of the series is a dramatic reversal of the refusal of St. Joachim’s prayers and gifts.

In the narrative of the frescoes, the reversal from sorrow to joy in the birth of their child is celebrated by Sts. Joachim and Anna (F8 and F9). St. Zachariah, the High Priest, shares in the joy of this divine reversal and accepts the gifts (F24). Sts. Zachariah and Elisabeth, as well as Sts. Joachim and Anna, rejoice in the fruitfulness of their marriages.

But this rejoicing goes beyond a joyful recognition that God has listened to their long years of prayer. It is a trusting response to a revelation that their children, St. John the Baptist (born to Elisabeth and Zachariah) and the Virgin Mary (the daughter of Anna and Joachim) will play central roles in the unfolding of salvation history. The prophetic role of the parents, who were once barren, is demonstrated especially in the fresco depicting the Visitation in the greeting of St. Elisabeth to the Virgin Mary, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” (Lk 1:42)

The canonical gospels narrate the inner struggle of Zachariah after the angel announced the coming birth of a son to his wife Elisabeth (Lk 1: 5-14), as well as his doubts and, finally, his joyful recognition of the child as having a role in salvation history “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” (Lk 1:17) The canonical gospels do not speak of him after the opening section of St. Luke’s Gospel, but the frescoes follow Tradition and depict Zachariah as the High Priest who recognizes the worthiness of Joachim’s gift-giving (F24) and who receives the Virgin Mary into the Temple at the age of three, prophetically placing her in the Holy of Holiest (F11). Moreover, he accepts the Mother of God again into the band of virgins in the Temple after she gave birth. This paradoxical acceptance points to the mystery of her virginal motherhood in the Incarnation of the Son of God. All this gives the ground for his later martyrdom at the time of Herod’s search for Christ.

The iconographer depicts this supreme paradox as it lies at the heart of the four Gospels and of the Tradition that reflect upon the mystery of the Incarnation. One sees the intense grappling with the shock of such a revelation in the distress of St. Joseph (F13). The fresco concerning the drinking of the water of conviction (F14) also explores the

public exposure and testing of the Mother of God about Christ's incarnation. Joseph's faithful exercise of his sacred trust as the protector of the divine Child is shown in the family's flight into Egypt and their return to Israel where the Child will reach manhood and begin his mission as the awaited Messiah who announces the good news of salvation to the whole human family (narratives depicted in the church's nave and in the altar).

The *gropnita*'s frescoes are clearly focused on the paradoxical nature of the conception and birth of the Son of God. The angel's greeting and the Virgin Mary's faithful response, despite her incomprehension (F12), to the annunciation of her motherhood of this Child are depicted in scene after scene. The initial incomprehension is shown in St. Joseph (F13 and F18), in the High Priest Zachariah (F14), and Salome (F18), as they are present in the Nativity scene. Even Satan is allowed to question such a paradox, where he has a probing conversation with the isolated figure of St. Joseph in the Nativity scene (F18). The depiction of this satanic 'curiosity' alongside the presence of Salome in the Nativity scene demonstrates the influence of apocryphal materials on Christian iconography.

The theme of divine 'reversal' in the change from bareness to the fruitfulness of parenthood is obviously an important element of the theological structure of the fresco series. But there is a further development of the theme selected by the iconographer. The divine intervention in the birth of a Child and the prophetic announcement of his role in salvation history according to Old Testament narratives is a kind of preparation for the culmination of such 'reversals' of human experience and expectation in the Incarnation of the Son of God into human history. The ultimate paradox of all logic and all experience of the second 'reversal,' is a Virgin giving birth to a Child and the acknowledgement that he

is the Son of God. The third ‘reversal’ is that the Son of God should assume human nature while remaining divine. This last is the supreme ‘reversal’ of all expectation.

6.3. The Analysis of Each Fresco of the Series Depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” in the *Gropnita* of Humor Monastic Church

The Mother of God is the fulfilment of the Old Testament and in her Christ inaugurated the New Testament. The passage from the Old to the New Testament is accomplished in her body through the Incarnation. The immense and utterly unique role which the Mother of God plays in Christian faith and Church’s life is depicted on the *gropnita* walls in the fresco series portraying her life. The following is an attempt to explain the genuine meaning, content and orientation of the Church’s on-going veneration reflected in each fresco composing the fresco series depicting the “Life of the Mother of God.”

6.3.1. Fresco 1: The Tabernacle of the Old Testament of the Jews

The first fresco of the series has *inserted* onto it the title, *Tabernacle of the Old Testament (or Covenant) of the Jews*, and it depicts an Old Testament High Priest in prayer. During the patriarchal period, the priestly functions, based on the natural order of the family, were carried out by the heads of clans. Later on, during the period of the Judges, the priestly offices were hereditary in the tribe of Levi.³⁷⁸ Consequently, the priesthood was the patrimony of Levite males by law and by birthright from generation to generation. The functions of priests were mainly cultic, but they were also entrusted with the task of preserving and passing down the law (Deuteronomy 33:10).

³⁷⁸ Jean Galot, s.j. *Theology of the Priesthood* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), pp. 21-23.

In the Old Testament, the role entrusted to the High Priest was to offer sacrifices as intercession for the salvation of humankind.³⁷⁹ The fresco depicts this cultic function of the High Priest and shows him praying before an altar of burnt sacrificial gifts brought by Jews depicted on the right of the fresco. The title of the fresco does not specify who the High Priest is, but, looking at the fresco of the *Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple*, one can see that he is identical to the High Priest Zachariah depicted in it. Though St. Luke's Gospel says that Zachariah was a priest (Lk 1:5), the Moldavian iconographer depicted him as High Priest, which distinction is confirmed by the Tradition. The justification for this title is found in the explanation of Luke 1:8-10 in the *Orthodox Study Bible*:

Each priest was assigned to a division (see 1Cr 23:3-11; 28:13). There were twenty-four divisions in all, each serving a week at a time in rotation. The responsibilities in the division were decided by lot; Zachariah was assigned the duties of the High Priest. This event took place at the time of the Atonement, when the High Priest would enter the Temple and make offerings for the sins of the people.³⁸⁰

Why did St. Zachariah receive such an important role to open the fresco series depicting the "Life of the Mother of God"? In Moldavian churches and, implicitly, in the church of Humor monastery, Zachariah is depicted as martyred in the narthex, where the lives of saints for the month of September are depicted (his martyrdom is commemorated on 5 September). According to Tradition, St. Zachariah was put to death because, when the Mother of God came to the temple with Christ child for her purification, "he placed her among the virgins, where women who have husbands have no right to stand."³⁸¹ This tradition came down from Gregory of Nyssa, who asserts that:

Everything Zachariah said was foretelling of the future. Led by the prophetic spirit to the knowledge of hidden mysteries, and aware of the mystery of virginity that

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.60.

³⁸⁰ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, p. 1362.

³⁸¹ Ouspensky and Lossky, *op.cit.*, p. 162; see also the *Synaxarion*, September 5, pp. 40-42.

surrounds the incorrupt birth, he does not remove the Virgin Mary from the place in the Temple that the law reserves to virgins. He explains to the Jews how the Creator and King of all creation holds human nature subject to himself, together with all other things, so that he governs it according to his pleasure and not controlled by it. Thus it is within his power to create a new kind of generation, which does not prevent a mother from remaining a virgin. This is the reason why Zachariah does not remove Mary from the place in the Temple reserved to virgins. The place in question was an area located between the temple court and the altar. The Jews, having heard that the king of creation, according to his divine pleasure, had come through a new kind of birth, and fearing to be subject to a king, slew Zachariah while he, in his capacity as priest, was offering the sacrifice in front of the altar, because he had witnessed to the events relating to Christ's birth.³⁸²

The act of placing Mary among the virgins is due to the prophetic power which St. Zachariah had to "see" the divinity of Christ and his birth from a Virgin. Therefore, the iconographer begins the "Life of the Mother of God" with the saint who was the first to venerate the Mother of God.

The iconographer of the *gropnita* did not depict St. Zachariah as martyred (as can be seen on the narthex frescoes) but in prayer for the sins of the people. The Gospel of Luke 1:8-14 reads that Zachariah prayed in the Temple, not for a son, although the Archangel Gabriel announced that he would have one (as he longed for a child), but for the atonement of the sins of Israel.³⁸³ This atonement is announced by the iconographer who placed a cross above the altar. The presence of the cross can be interpreted to suggest that "with the death of Christ there ceases to be a reason for offering a new sacrifice for sins," because the remission of the sins of mankind "has been secured once and for all by the sacrifice of Christ."³⁸⁴ It is known that before an emperor entered a fortress, he would send messengers in advance to announce his coming. It is the same in this fresco, the burnt

³⁸² Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Birth of Christ*, Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graecis (Paris: Migne, 1841-1864) 46, 1137 A-B.

³⁸³ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, notes for 1 Luke 1:13.

³⁸⁴ Galot, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

sacrifices offered by the High Priest constitute a prefiguration, an announcement, of the coming sacrifice of Christ on the cross, who will deliver mankind from their sins.

In the fresco, there is another cross placed on the top of the Temple. The Temple with a cross above it prefigures the future Christian Church. In the church at Humor, there are other places where the Temple is depicted as foreshadowing the Christian Church. On the iconostasis, for example, Solomon is depicted carrying in his hands, not the Temple, but a Moldavian church. No wonder that Solomon is depicted carrying a Moldavian church replacing the Temple, since the architecture of the Moldavian church follows the main architectural components of the Old Testament Temple: the altar (the Holy of Holies in the Temple: 1 Kings 6:19; 8:6), the nave (the Holy Place in the Temple: 1 Kings 8:8-10), and the porch (the porch in the Temple: 1 Kings 6:3). The Moldavian church's architecture was enriched with another room, namely the narthex. Between the narthex and the other two rooms, i.e. the altar and the nave (where the Liturgy takes place), there is a wall with a door. As a general rule (not always respected), a non-baptized person, along with those who sinned gravely and have become excluded from communion for a period, are not allowed to pass from the narthex to the nave. Those who sinned and who must follow a canon of repentance could enter the narthex to recite his/her prayers for being re-accepted into the community, but they are not allowed to enter within the liturgical space. In fact, the entire architecture of the church symbolizes the journey towards Paradise: from the narthex, a place of repentance, towards the altar, the place of offering in celebration of the Eucharist, where bread and wine are transformed by the Holy Spirit into the Body and Blood of Christ.³⁸⁵ The *gropnita*, added to the church of Humor Monastery, speaks about

³⁸⁵ This interpretation of the church's architecture as a man's journey belongs to Gabriel Herea, *Pelerinaj in spatiul sacru bucovinean* (Cluj, Romania: Editura Patmos, 2010), p. 25.

the death and resurrection of Christians in and with Christ. The *gropnita*, like the nave in other Moldavian churches, is separated from the narthex by a passageway. Although there is no door, as in other Moldavian churches, the entrance to the *gropnita* (part of the liturgical place) is guarded by the Archangel Michael, depicted at the right of the passageway. The depiction of the archangel alludes to God's order to the angels to guard the entrance to the Garden of Eden where is located the tree of life (Genesis 3:24). "The tree of life prefigures Christ, through whom man regains Paradise."³⁸⁶ Thus, a parishioner in the church of Humor Monastery has before him/her the narthex, a place of repentance and of Christianization in baptism, the *gropnita*, the place to die and resurrect with Christ, and finally the nave and altar, an image of Paradise on earth, the location where the Liturgy takes place. Moreover, on the table of the altar there is the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, which, for the Orthodox Christian, is the tree of life.

Although the first fresco of the "Life of the Mother of God" is not linked with a specific text, it speaks abundantly about the things to come and it is very significant for understanding the theological focus of the fresco series concerning the role of the Mother of God in the Incarnation. Moreover, the fresco depicting St. Zachariah in prayer announces the birth and life of the Mother of God, who is the beginning of the fulfilment of the Old Testament prayers and prophecies, as she is the one "who was to lend her human nature to Christ, so that the mystery of the Incarnation could be realized."³⁸⁷

³⁸⁶ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, the explanation of Genesis 3:24.

³⁸⁷ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), p.140.

6.3.2. Fresco 2: Joachim and Anna Bringing Their Sacrifice to the Temple

The theme of Joachim and Anna bringing their sacrifice to God is the second fresco from the cycle representing the “Life of the Mother of God.” This theme is never represented in isolation, but only in connection with other depictions of the life of Mary.³⁸⁸ The first known representations of this theme are in the Cappadocian church of Kizil Çukur (end of the eleventh century)³⁸⁹ and the miniature of the *Homilies* written by the Greek monk Jacobus Kokkinobaphos (beginning of the twelfth century).³⁹⁰ During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it was illustrated in many Macedonian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Russian, and Athonite churches where one or more images referring to the life of the Mother of God were used.³⁹¹ The usual title for the fresco is the *Refused Gifts* but the Moldavian iconographer transformed the title to *Joachim and Anna Bringing Their Sacrifice to the Temple*.

Both the *Synaxarion* and the *Protogospel*, the literary sources for this fresco, describe how Joachim's offering was rejected because he was childless. Childlessness was considered a divine punishment for sin, and the priest could not accept his offering since Joachim was seen as ‘unworthy’ of the sacrificial custom. Although the fresco is obviously a transposition of the texts of the *Synaxarion* and *Protogospel* into the fresco, it was not the priest Reuben, whom the texts include, that the iconographer depicted alongside Joachim and Anna but, instead, Zachariah. The High Priest is Zachariah and his identity is

³⁸⁸ Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

³⁸⁹ Nicole Thierry, “Église de Kizil-Tchoukour, chapelle iconoclaste, chapelle de Joachim et d’Anne,” *Monuments Piot, L* (1958), p. 105.

³⁹⁰ Adelheid Heimann, “The Capital Frieze and Pilasters of the Portail Royal, Chartres,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 31 (1968), pp. 77-78.

³⁹¹ Lafontaine-Dosogne, *op.cit.*, p. 64.

unquestionable, since he is identical with the one depicted in the fresco of *the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple* and because he is haloed, the only Old Testament High Priest depicted as a saint in Orthodox iconography being Zachariah.

St. Zachariah stands on the extreme left of the fresco, with his left hand open in rejection of the gifts brought to the Temple by Sts. Joachim and Anna. Nevertheless, at the same time, he blesses Joachim and Anna with his right hand. The fingers of his right hand are curved in the shape of the letters abbreviating Christ's name in Greek (IC XC).

Through this gesture, the iconographer *transfigured* the texts depicted showing that Joachim and Anna were to be chosen by God to be the parents of Mary, the future Mother of the Son of God. By this gesture and by the representation of a cross on the top of the Temple placed above Zachariah's head, the iconographer also alluded to the power of priests in general, and, in particular, of Orthodox priests to bless people in the name of Christ.³⁹² Although the gifts brought by Joachim and Anna are refused, the High Priest blesses them, emphasizing that, yes, the birth of the Virgin Mary is God's acceptance of Sts. Joachim and Anna's prayers, as we will see in the following frescoes. At the same time, however, the blessing is an answer to the priest's prayers, as the first fresco depicts, and of the blessing he gave to Joachim and Anna, as the second fresco depicts.

In the written narratives, Joachim attempts to make his offering alone, while Anna is not present at the Temple, in contrast with the fresco, where both of them are depicted.

Adelheid Heimann notes that Anna appears next to Joachim in an illustrated manuscript

³⁹² Orthodoxy holds that priests can bless in the name of Jesus Christ, but also that whatever they bind on earth will be bound in heaven (as Apostles' successors through the mystery of ordination), and whatever they loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:19). Moreover, when they forgive anyone's sins, those sins are forgiven. Likewise, if they do not forgive them, they are not forgiven (John 20:23). Orthodoxy emphasizes especially the priest's power of blessing because the goal of the priest is to help the believer to approach the Eucharist and implicitly the church, and not to keep him away from communion. See: Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2003), p. 30.

with scenes from the *Protogospel of James*.³⁹³ It is known that the majority of the *Protogospel* manuscripts are not illustrated. However, there are two Greek twelfth-century copies of the *Homilies* written by the Greek monk Jacobus Kokkinobaphos, produced in Constantinople, which are illustrated with scenes from the *Protogospel*.³⁹⁴ One of these is preserved at the Vatican (Vat. gr. 1162), while the other is in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Par. gr. 1208). The miniatures from the Greek *Homilies* could have influenced Byzantine iconography with this theme, but we cannot state with certainty that the Moldavian iconographer knew of or saw these illustrations. The series of frescoes depicting the “Life of the Mother of God,” from the *Protogospel of James* and the *Synaxarion*, at the church of Humor Monastery, has several images not illustrated in the Kokkinobaphos’ *Homilies*, namely those representing the life of Mary after she was entrusted to Joseph.

The portrayal of St. Anna at the Temple might be the influence of Cyril of Jerusalem’s sermon on this subject.³⁹⁵ His sermon states that Joachim and Anna went together to the Temple to pray to the Lord to cease their infertility. Joachim heard a voice that came from the altar telling him that his prayer was heard and that his petition would be fulfilled. He thought that the voice was that of the priest and, together with his wife Anna, he returned home as the voice instructed. Several days later, Joachim visited Anna, and she became pregnant. The presence of Anna at the side of her husband when his gifts were refused shows “the bond between husband and wife as well as the shared problem of infertility.”³⁹⁶ The presence of St. Anna in the fresco is important because her prayer,

³⁹³ Adelheid Heimann, “The Capital Frieze and Pilasters of the Portail Royal, Chartres,” p. 78.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³⁹⁵ Wallis E. A. Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London, UK, 1915), p. 632.

³⁹⁶ Laura Spitzer, “The Cult of the Virgin and Gothic Sculpture: Evaluating Opposition in the Chartres West Facade Capital Frieze,” *Gesta* 33 (1994), p. 137.

alongside the blessing and prayer of the priest and the prayer of Joseph, is an example of the power of communion in prayer. She was barren and aged, but because of communion in prayer, God reversed the laws of nature, thus destroying the bonds of barrenness in giving her a child.

6.3.3. Fresco 3: The Angel of the Lord Appeared to Joachim in a Desert

The next three frescoes depict the prayers of Sts. Joachim and Anna. The prayer of Joachim is at the left side, and is followed by that of Anna, and the third depicts them both. The fresco of Joachim's prayer is first because we 'read' frescoes from left to right and the literary sources transposed onto the fresco mentions that, after his gifts were refused at the Temple, Joachim went into the desert. In the fresco, Joachim is in deep grief, sitting in a corner, his right arm falling on his knees and his head resting on his left hand. Two shepherds stand in front of him, and the link between them is established by his gaze and their gestures of stretching their right hand toward him in an address.

Above Joachim is an angel, portrayed in half-length, who descends from heaven towards him. In iconography in general, angels always have wings, indicating their swiftness to go, as God's messengers, wherever God sends them. Representation of winged angels (emphasizing their ability to move swiftly from place to place like the wind) is connected with the writings of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, who names the angels "winds":

They [the angels] are also named 'winds' as a sign of the virtually instant speed with which they operate everywhere, their coming and going from above to below and again from below to above as they raise up their subordinates to the highest

peak and as they prevail upon their own superiors to proceed down into fellowship with and concern for those beneath them.³⁹⁷

Since an angel is depicted in the fresco, the question is: Who is he? The *insertion* of the written text of the fresco does not indicate the identity of the angel. He might be Joachim's guardian angel since Joachim is in prayer and one of the attributes of protective angels is to be an angel of prayer.³⁹⁸ In Orthodoxy, there are two opinions concerning guardian angels. The first holds that only Christians have protective angels received as gifts at the moment of their baptism. According to this view, Joachim, who is not a Christian, does not have one.³⁹⁹ The second opinion holds that the dignity of man, created in God's own image and likeness, is a sufficient argument to make plausible the hypothesis of a guardian angel received by all men and women at their birth.

In iconography, the angel of the good news is par excellence the Archangel Gabriel because of his revelation to the Virgin Mary that she was chosen to bear the Son of God. Thus, the angel in this fresco could be the Archangel Gabriel, coming down from heaven to give Joachim the good news of his future fatherhood. Moreover, in his left hand the angel carries a spear and with his right hand he blesses Joachim in the name of Jesus Christ (one 'reads' the blessing by the shape of the angel's fingers) exactly as the Painter's Manual directs for painting the Archangel Gabriel.⁴⁰⁰

In the background of the fresco, mountains are represented in steps in inverse perspective with their lines converging towards the viewer. The iconographer transfigured the physical space into iconic space using the technique of inverse perspective. In this

³⁹⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *op.cit.*, p. 187.

³⁹⁸ Jean Danielou, following the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, unifies the attributes of the guardian angel to be angels of peace, of repentance, and of prayers. See: *Les Anges et leur mission d'après les Pères de l'Église* (Ciney, Belgique : Éditions de Chevetogne, 1953), pp. 98-110.

³⁹⁹ About the discussions concerning the guardian angel, see: Andrei Plesu, *Despre ingerii* (Bucuresti, Romania: Humanitas), pp. 86-87.

⁴⁰⁰ On how the Archangel Gabriel has to be depicted, see: *The Painter's Manual*, p. 32 (165).

perspective, the image is placed in a two-dimensional space, which differs radically from the physical space of three dimensions. The depicted event is changed from a familiar spatial environment into another type of space, one that is spiritual. In the inverse perspective, the vanishing point moves out towards the viewer of the fresco, inviting him/her 'to participate' in the pictorial event. The iconographical technique of 'approaching the viewer' can be compared to narrative techniques, which aim at bringing the reader closer to the action by reducing the narration's speed or by narration in the present tense.

A scrutiny of frescoes in general reveals that they often show parts and surfaces that cannot be seen simultaneously in the real world. Consequently, the laws of perspective are not respected. Since frescoes transgress the laws of perspective, they can be viewed as painted in a naive way, as lacking artistic literacy. However, there are frescoes painted by top-ranking artists, who received international recognition and who did not lack artistic literacy, yet who followed the same method. Therefore, departure from the 'perspective' rule constitutes a premeditated, conscious method of icon painting. Pavel Florensky, referring to the inverse perspective characterizing Orthodox icons, says that these 'illiteracies' of drawings, which normally ought to alert any viewer who understands the 'obvious absurdity' of such a depiction, arouses pleasing and admiring feelings:

When the viewer has the chance to see two or three frescoes from about the same period and painted with approximately equal skill, he perceives an enormous artistic superiority in that fresco which demonstrates the greatest violation of the rules of perspective, whereas the frescoes which have been drawn more 'correctly' seem cold, lifeless and lacking the slightest connection with the reality depicted in them. It always transpires that the frescoes that are the most creative in terms of immediate artistic perception are perspectively 'defective', whereas frescoes that better satisfy the perspective textbook are boring and soulless. If you allow yourself simply to forget the formal demands of perspectival rendering for a while, then

direct artistic feeling will lead everyone to admit the superiority of icons that transgress the laws of perspective.⁴⁰¹

In the fresco the *Angel of the Lord Appeared to Joachim in a Desert*, the mountains are in inverse perspective and have ‘steps,’ a detail that symbolizes a ladder by which to ascend to God, a ladder ascended by means of prayer and fasting. This underlies the principle that solitude brings one closer to God.

Next to the fresco depicting Joachim in the wilderness is the fresco of his wife Anna in prayer, presented below.

6.3.4. Fresco 4: Anna Prays in Her Garden

In earlier representations of St. Anna’s prayer, dated to the pre-iconoclast period (i.e. before the eighth century), she was depicted seated, using as model the seated Virgin Mary from the scene of the *Annunciation*.⁴⁰² Later, the Virgin Mary is shown standing, and Anna’s representation followed the model of her daughter. Starting with the twelfth century, Mary is depicted either seated or standing in icons of the *Annunciation*, but her mother is shown standing in all the depictions of her prayer or annunciation, a rule obeyed also by the Moldavian iconographer.⁴⁰³

The image of St. Anna’s prayer was sometimes linked with Joachim in the wilderness, but at Humor, she is alone. The Moldavian iconographer chose to illustrate Anna alone to show that, as the *Protogospel* and the *Synaxarion* narrate, she did not know that her husband went into a mountain to fast and pray. As the fresco illustrates and as the

⁴⁰¹ Pavel Florensky, *Beyond Vision: Essay on the Perception of Art*, translated by Wendy Salmond (Bodmin, UK: MPG Books, 2002), p. 202.

⁴⁰² Lafontaine-Dosogne, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p. 71.

⁴⁰³ For the oldest representations of Anna standing, see icon reproductions in Lafontaine-Dosogne’s book, *Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'Empire byzantin et en Occident*, vol.1, p. 250.

inscribed title reads, Anna is in her garden praying. This fresco, together with the previous fresco, emphasises the importance of prayer in the life of believers and also that Joachim and Anna's future child is the fruit of their prayers. They did not lose hope in God, although they were old and continuously prayed until their desire to have a child was fulfilled by God.

St. Anna is depicted as totally transfigured by her prayer. Her large and vivid eyes bear witness to the Scriptures: "My eyes are always towards the Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the trap" (Ps.24(25):15). "For my eyes have seen Your salvation" (Luke 2:30). Her long and fine nose emphasizes her nobility, whereas her thin mouth, without any sensuality and very geometrical, is closed, as prayer demands silence. Her head is covered, as are her ears. Thus, the noise of the world does not disturb her prayer. Her entire body is depicted without anatomic 'precision' or details, giving her a new transfigured body by prayer. The absence of realism reminds us that we perceive, in the bodies of saints (as in the case of St. Anna), the spiritual world, and not only the physical world.⁴⁰⁴

The fresco shows St. Anna in prayer, and since prayer is always a dialog, God, as the divine 'Other' is addressed. "The dialogical character of prayer means that God is able to speak, and human's heart is able to hear."⁴⁰⁵ God's response to Anna's prayer is symbolized by a hand reaching down from heaven through the clouds. The fingers of the hand are aligned to form the monogram of Jesus Christ. The monogram is a symbolic prediction of the good things to come: Sts. Joachim and Anna are called to be the parents of Mary, the future Mother of God Incarnate. Moreover, in depicting Anna in prayer and the

⁴⁰⁴ For the depiction of saints' bodies in iconography, see: Michel Quenot, *L'icône fenêtre sur l'absolu* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1987), pp. 121-127.

⁴⁰⁵ Bartholomew (Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople), *Encountering the Mystery: Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today* (New York, NY: Random House, 2008), p. 77.

hand abbreviating the name of Jesus Christ, the iconographer alludes to the Jesus Prayer. This is a much esteemed and widely practiced prayer within the Orthodox Church in general and in Moldavian monasteries in particular.

The Jesus Prayer is a short contemplative prayer that reads, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.” It is used predominantly by the *Hesychasts* (monks, nuns and laity looking for *hesychia*, of that inner profound peace that reveals God). The Orthodox doctrine of *Hesychasm* (a mystical tradition of experiential prayer in the Orthodox Church) substantially influenced Moldavian iconography. One influence is the representation of the bodies of saints in an elongated form to accentuate their ascetic life.⁴⁰⁶ For example, in the fresco of St. Anna’s prayer, her body is depicted in an elongated form, an attempt of the iconographer to show that her body is transfigured by grace in prayer. The iconographer painted several stars, indicating that the prayer scene occurred at night. Thus, he teaches the viewer that “night-time is particularly helpful for the practice of the Jesus Prayer on account of the darkness and silence.”⁴⁰⁷

In the upper right side of the fresco *Anna is Prays in Her Garden* and continuing above the upper part of a polygonal column, which hides the stairs leading towards the secret room located above the *gropnita*, is another depiction of Joachim and Anna’s prayer. It is analyzed below.

6.3.5. Fresco 5: Joachim and Anna Praying at a Distance from Each Other

Fresco 5 repeats Joachim and Anna’s prayers, but in a different manner. On the right, above Joachim’s head, God’s hand extends out from the clouds, whereas on the left,

⁴⁰⁶ M.J Le Guillou, *The Tradition of Eastern Orthodox* (London, UK: Burns & Oates), 1968, p. 55.

⁴⁰⁷ Ignatius Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus* (Boston, Mass.: Shambhala Publications, 2006), p. 12.

above Anna's head, is the same extended hand. The iconographer *transfigured* time and space, and depicted in a single fresco events that unfolded at different times and in different places.⁴⁰⁸ Joachim and Anna are in the same fresco, and they are back to back because they did not know about each other's place and time of prayer. At the same time, the location of where they prayed is changed, for Joachim is no longer on the mountain and Anna is no longer in her garden, but both are in a paradisiacal garden. The iconographer used white to depict the paradisiacal garden, a color used only in certain images.

The color white represents divinity and purity, and, because of its total absence of coloration, it is considered closest to light itself. White is reserved in iconography for Christ in scenes of the Resurrection, the Transfiguration, and the Nativity.⁴⁰⁹ Yet, Moldavian iconographers also used the color white in other icons. In the series of frescoes depicting the creation of the world and of man, from the moment when God placed man in paradise until the Fall when man was expelled from Eden, the background of the frescoes is entirely white.⁴¹⁰ The same chromatic solution is used in the lower level of frescoes of the Last Judgment, where the fortress of Paradise is depicted. In the middle of the white Paradise, are the Mother of God with the Child, the saved thief, and the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, each one of whom is carrying saved souls in his bosom.⁴¹¹

In a totally unexpected manner, the Moldavian iconographer used white in the fresco of *Joachim and Anna praying at a Distance from Each Other*. They receive the

⁴⁰⁸ For an explanation of the transfiguration of time and space in iconography, see: Constantine Cavarnos, *Guide to Byzantine Iconography: Detailed Explanation of the Distinctive Characteristics of Byzantine Iconography* (Boston, Mass.: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1993), p. 38.

⁴⁰⁹ Egon Sendler, *The Icon, Image of the Invisible: Elements of Theology, Aesthetics and Technique*, translated by Steven Bigham (Torrance, CA: Oakwood Publications 1999), p. 150.

⁴¹⁰ The series of frescoes depicting the Creation is present in many exteriorly painted churches, one of them being Humor monastic church.

⁴¹¹ On the color white used as a background by iconographers in Moldavian churches, see: Gabriel Herea, *op.cit.*, pp. 63 and 85.

answer to their prayers in a place similar to locations suggestive of Paradise. The iconographer suggests that, through the conception by St. Anna of the Virgin Mary, the future Mother of God, is created the premise of the reopening of Paradise's gates.

Following the portrayed prayers of Joachim and Anna, another fresco, the *Kiss of Joachim and Anna*, speaks precisely about the birth of Mary.

6.3.6. Fresco 6: The Kiss of Joachim and Anna

The pictorial theme of the embrace of Joachim and Anna is widespread among Eastern and Western churches. In Byzantine Churches, this theme, often named the *Conception of the Most Holy Mother of God* after the liturgical day it represents, was depicted as early as the feast was introduced into the liturgical celebration, which was at the end of the eighth century.⁴¹² The feast was of minor importance compared with the two major feasts of the *Nativity of the Mother of God* and the *Entry into the Temple of the Mother of God*.

In contrast with the Orthodox Church, the theme of the embrace of Joachim and Anna entered relatively late into Western imagery (the beginning of the fourteenth-century), and depicts the Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception.⁴¹³ This dogma asserts that the Virgin Mary was released from the stain of original sin from the time when she was conceived. She was protected from original sin by Christ who, as the perfect Redeemer, was capable of exempting his mother from original sin before her birth.⁴¹⁴ The dogma was pronounced and defined in the Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus* of 8 December,

⁴¹² Lafontaine-Dosogne, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p. 83.

⁴¹³ Michelle A. Erhardt, "The Immaculate Kiss beneath the Golden Gate: The Influence of John Duns Scotus on Florentine Painting of the 14th Century," *Franciscan Studies* 66 (2008), p. 271.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 272-274.

1854, by Pius IX as follows: “In the first instance of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin.”⁴¹⁵ Although not officially claimed as a dogma of the Catholic Church until 1854, the notion of the Immaculate Conception gained immense popularity during the medieval period due to the Franciscans, who were its greatest exponents, although the Dominicans rejected it.⁴¹⁶

The *Protogospel of James* had great influence, not only in defining the Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception, but also in Eastern Orthodox iconography and Western imagery. Of the one hundred and one manuscripts of the *Protogospel* that de Strycker put together in his research, twenty-three of them erased the passage referring to the meeting between Joachim and Anna and the latter’s pregnancy (*Protogospel* 4: 2-4).⁴¹⁷ The remaining seventy-three employ a different wording in referring to Anna’s pregnancy. Forty-five manuscripts of this latter group use the future tense, “she will conceive”, whereas the other twenty-eight employ the past tense, “she conceived,” which implies the miraculous conception. Stycker asserts that the oldest manuscripts use the past tense for Anna’s pregnancy. In his opinion, to think that Anna conceived ‘in the past’ (referring to a natural conception before Joachim went to the desert) is groundless since Anna started to pray for a child after her husband departed and her pregnancy was the answer to her prayers. He concludes that Joachim returned from the desert one month after the miraculous conception took place. But this idea is far from the Orthodox teaching, on the one hand, about God’s reversal of Joachim and Anna’s barrenness into a fruitful

⁴¹⁵Raymond F. Bulman and Frederick J. Parrella eds., *From Trent to Vatican 2: Historical and Theological Investigations* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 2006, p. 183.

⁴¹⁶Michelle A. Erhardt, “The Immaculate Kiss beneath the Golden Gate: The Influence of John Duns Scotus on Florentine Painting of the 14th Century,” *Franciscan Studies* 66 (2008), p. 272; *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁷de Strycker, *op.cit.*, pp. 81-83.

parenthood and, on the other hand, about the Catholic teaching of the Immaculate, or ‘miraculous,’ Conception.

The influence of the Immaculate Conception coincides with the proliferation of Western imagery devoted to the meeting of Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate, the symbolical depiction of Mary’s Immaculate Conception.⁴¹⁸ The general outlines of the scene are: Joachim and Anna’s joyful reunion, their embrace, a pregnant Anna sweetly touching her husband’s cheek, and their kiss.

In Eastern Orthodoxy, theologians such as Sergei Bulgakov deny the teaching of the Immaculate Conception and the Virgin’s freedom from original sin, though they do teach that the Virgin was totally free from any personal sin. Bulgakov also asserts that the Virgin was cleansed from the stain of original sin not at her birth, but later at the time of the Annunciation, when the Holy Spirit overshadowed her:

The Orthodox Church does not accept the Catholic dogma of 1854 - the dogma of the immaculate conception of the Virgin, in the sense that she was exempt at birth from original sin. This would separate her from the human race, and she would then have been unable to transmit humanity to her Son. But Orthodoxy does not admit in the all-pure Virgin any individual sin, for that would be unworthy of the dignity of the Mother of God.⁴¹⁹

Thus, when the Holy Spirit came to dwell in the Virgin Mary, she acquired “a dyadic life, human and divine; that is she was completely deified, because in Her hypostatic being was manifest the living, creative revelation of the Holy Spirit.”⁴²⁰ “She is a perfect manifestation of the Third Hypostasis”⁴²¹, “a creature, but also no longer a creature.”⁴²²

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

⁴¹⁹ Sergei Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, translated by Lydia Kesich (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press), 1988, p. 117.

⁴²⁰ Sergei Bulgakov, *The Unburnt Bush* (Paris, France, 1927), p.154.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

Bulgakov's theology concerning the uniting together of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary into a single deity or hypostasis of God, named *sophianism*, is, according to other Orthodox theologians, a misguided theology, and was even condemned by the Russian Orthodox Church.⁴²³ The Orthodox position on Mary's Immaculate Conception or her freedom from any personal sin is synthesized by St. John Maximovitch, who writes that "the Orthodox Church highly exalting the Mother of God in its hymns of praise, does not dare to ascribe to Her that which has not been communicated about Her by Sacred Scripture or Tradition."⁴²⁴ He argues:

The teaching that the Mother of God was purified before Her birth, so that from Her might be born the Pure Christ, is meaningless; because if the Pure Christ could be born only if the Virgin might be born pure, it would be necessary that Her parents also should be pure of original sin, and they again would have to be born of purified parents, and going further in this way, one would have to come to the conclusion that Christ could not have become incarnate unless all His ancestors in the flesh, right to Adam inclusive, had been purified beforehand of original sin. But then there would not have been any need for the very Incarnation of Christ, since Christ came down to earth in order to annihilate sin.

The teaching that the Mother of God was preserved from the original sin, as likewise the teaching that She was preserved by God's grace from personal sin, makes God unmerciful and unjust; because if God could preserve Mary from sin and purify Her before Her birth, then why does He not purify other men before their birth, but rather leaves them in sin? It follows likewise that God saves men apart from their will, predetermining certain ones before their birth to salvation.

This teaching, which seemingly has the aim to exalting the Mother of God, in reality completely denies all Her virtues. After all, if Mary, even in the womb of Her mother, when She could not even desire anything either good or evil, was preserved by God's grace from every impurity, and then by the grace was preserved from sin even after her birth, then in what does Her merit consist? If She could have been placed in the state of being unable to sin, and did not sin, then for what did God glorify Her? If She with any effort, and without having any kind of impulses to sin, remained pure, then why is She crowned more than everyone else? There is no victory without adversary.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, p.191.

⁴²³ Bryn Geffert, "The Charges of Heresy Against Sergii Bulgakov: The Majority and Minority Reports of Evlogii's Commission and the Final Report of the Bishops' Conference," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 49.1-2 (2005), pp. 47-66 and Alexis Klimoff, "Georges Florovsky and the Sophiological Controversy", *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 49 (2005), pp. 67-100.

⁴²⁴ St. John Maximovitch, *The Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God* (Platina, Ca: St. Herman Press, 1996), p. 54.

The righteousness and sanctity of the Virgin Mary were manifested in the fact that She, being “human with passions like us,” so loved God and gave Herself over to Him, that by Her purity She was exalted high above the rest of the human race. For this, having been foreknown and forechosen, She was vouchsafed to be purified by the Holy Spirit Who came upon Her, and to conceive of Him the very Savior of the world. The teaching of the grace-given sinlessness of the Virgin Mary denies Her victory over temptations; from a victor who is worthy to be crowned with crowns of glory, this makes Her a blind instrument of God’s Providence.⁴²⁵

The Orthodox teaching concerning the birth of Mary is *transfigured* on the fresco.

For this reason, St. Anna is not shown pregnant as one sees her in western imagery, but the image shows only the embrace between her and her husband. In the church of Humor monastery, the iconographer used the traditional representation of the embrace, where Anna is not shown pregnant and where Joachim has his right hand positioned on Anna’s shoulder, not on her womb. Anna embraces Joachim and her cheek affectionately rests on Joachim’s cheek.

The fresco *transfigured* Joachim and Anna’s saintliness by halos depicted around their head. They were often compared to the patriarch Abraham and his wife Sarah who, as promised by God, bore Isaac in old age.⁴²⁶ However, it can be said that the nativity of the Virgin Mary was superior to the birth of Isaac. As much as the Virgin Mary is more worthy of honor than Isaac, so Joachim and Anna are greater in theological meaning than Abraham and Sarah. Sts. Joachim and Anna surpassed others by their virtues since they appeared before God worthy to be the parents of the Virgin Mary, the future Mother of God. The mercy of becoming the parents of the Mother of God and, accordingly, the ancestors of

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-60.

⁴²⁶ *Wider than Heaven – Eight-Century Homilies on the Mother of God*, translated by Mary B. Cunningham (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), pp. 27-28.

God incarnate, would not have been granted to them if they did not indeed surpass others in righteousness and holiness by fasting and prayer.⁴²⁷

There are no other written words *inserted* onto the fresco besides its name, *the Kiss of Joachim and Anna*. The title is important especially for couples trying to have children, Sts. Joachim and Anna are considered great intercessors before God for those who want but cannot have children. This is not only to recognize the saints, but also to know that the image received the ‘seal’ of authenticity, thus enabling prayers to be recited in front of it.

Starting in the eighteenth century, it was necessary that icons be blessed by a priest who recited specific prayers over them in order that the iconic representation be considered sacred.⁴²⁸ The problem of the holiness of icons without a blessing was posed in the Christian Church since the eighth century.⁴²⁹ According to one opinion, without specific prayers, an image is not transported from the realm of the profane to that of the sacred. Thus, such an image has no sacred value. According to another view, icons do not require sanctification prayers because their titles indicate that they are sacred and filled with grace.⁴³⁰ If the cross, which by its shape alone is sanctified and does not need consecration prayers, the same principle ought similarly to apply for icons. By the title written on it, this view continues, the image receives the blessing and does not need special consecration prayers.

To conclude, in Orthodox iconography, the embrace of Joachim and Anna is the traditional marriage icon with no allusion to the Immaculate Conception. The icon is the

⁴²⁷ St. Maximus the Confessor, Ioan I. Ica jr. trad., *Viata Maicii Domnului* (in Romanian) (*The Life of the Mother of God*) (Sibiu, Ro.: Editura Deisis, 1998), pp. 7-9.

⁴²⁸ Stéphane Bigham, *Iconologie; Neuf Études* (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2005), p. 143.

⁴²⁹ The problem of the icons’ holiness is analyzed in-depth by Stéphane Bigham in his book, *Iconologie; Neuf Études*, p. 143.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-158.

image of two married saints, Joachim and Anna, great intercessors especially for couples trying to have children. At the same time, the depiction emphasizes the central theological understanding of God's intervention in the salvation history of humankind.

The series of frescoes depicting the *Life of the Mother of God* in the *gropnita* of the church of Humor Monastery continues with the *Nativity of the Mother of God*, whose theological interpretation will be presented next.

6.3.7. Fresco 7: The Nativity of the Mother of God

Ouspensky and Lossky assert that, of the feasts of the Mother of God, her birth was the first to be celebrated in the Orthodox liturgy, beginning in the seventh century.⁴³¹

Gaetano Passarelli states that the feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God has been celebrated in the Church of Jerusalem since the fifth century.⁴³² A century later, during the reign of Justinian I (527-529), the feast was introduced in Constantinople, as is attested to by Romanos the Melodist in one of his poems dated 536-556.⁴³³

The Mother of God and St. John the Baptist are the only saints whose birthdays are celebrated in Orthodoxy. The *Nativity of the Mother of God*, one of the twelve great feasts of the Orthodox Church and the first to be celebrated in the liturgical year starting September 1, is celebrated on September 8.⁴³⁴ Why was the day of celebration established

⁴³¹ Ouspensky and Lossky, *op.cit.*, p. 145.

⁴³² Gaetano Passarelli, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁴ There are two groups in Orthodoxy, the one using the "Old Calendar" celebrating Mary's birth on September 21, whereas the other group using the "New Calendar" celebrates this feast on September 8. The Orthodox Churches of the old calendar are those that observe the Julian calendar for the liturgical feasts. There are many Churches which use the Old Calendar, such as the Russian Orthodox Church and Mount Athos. The Churches of the New Calendar use for the liturgical feast the Gregorian calendar, with one exception: the feast of the Resurrection of Christ when they observe the Old Calendar, with the rest of the Orthodox churches. Thus, although the dates for the liturgical feasts differ in the two groups of churches, at least the Feast of Pascha is celebrated on the same date.

by the Church on the 8th and not on the 1st of September? According to Passarelli, the number 8 announces the eternal era to come, since the eighth day, when mankind is renewed in Christ, follows the six days of creation and the Sabbath.⁴³⁵ The number 7 is considered the number for the Old Testament whereas the number 8 is for the New Testament. The latter is a proclamation of the beatitude of a new era that begins with the birth of the Virgin Mary. As the Church sings, “the preordained tabernacle of our reconciliation with God now begins,” and “today grace begins to bear its fruits.”⁴³⁶

The *Nativity of the Mother of God* is the first great feast of the liturgical year and since it is placed at the beginning of the liturgical year, it is a feast par excellence of beginnings. It is the feast of the beginning of redemption, because it refers to that person who was worthy to receive in her womb the Son of God incarnate who brings reconciliation between God and humankind, and redemption for the sins of humanity.⁴³⁷ The Nativity of the Mother of God is a celebration of beginnings, as any birth is a beginning. In Orthodoxy, she is most venerated and has the position of first intercessor among saints due to her special status among all human beings as the Mother of God. St. Dimitri of Rostov observed that the person of the Virgin is unique and not repeatable, given that in her dwelled the whole divine fire.⁴³⁸

One could ask, said Dimitri of Rostov (seventeenth-century), why the Word of God delayed His descent to the earth and his incarnation to save fallen humanity. But before the middle of the sixth millennium since the fall of Adam, it was not possible to find a virgin pure in body as well as in spirit. There was only one such, unique by

⁴³⁵ Gaetano Passarelli, *op.cit.*, pp. 31-32.

⁴³⁶ Mattins, First Canon, Canticle Eight, and Great Vespers, sticheron on *Lord, I have cried*, in *The Festal Menaion*, p. 49.

⁴³⁷ John of Damascus, “An Oration on the Nativity of the Holy Theotokos Mary,” in *Wider than Heaven*, pp. 53-56 and 61.

⁴³⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 140 and Dimitri of Rostov, t. III, p. 101, *Christian Readings*, 1842: 395 (in Russian).

her spiritual and bodily purity who was worthy to become the church and the temple of the Holy Spirit.⁴³⁹

Thus, the Nativity of the Mother of God is the prologue for the history of the salvation of humanity, and on September 8 the Church celebrates the one who was chosen by God to be the “new Eve”, the Mother of Christ the Saviour, the well-spring of our redemption and the archetype of all Christian holiness.⁴⁴⁰ The feast of the *Nativity of the Mother of God* is an occasion of great joy, as the liturgical texts sing and as the icon of the feast shows. The fresco in the *gropnita* of the church of Humor Monastery shows the iconic tradition for this feast and transmits the same theological message as the homilies of the Church Fathers and the liturgical texts.

The iconographer *transposed* the written narration into the fresco, alluding to the fact that the scene takes place inside Anna’s house. As a rule, when a scene takes place inside, the iconographers depict a fabric cloth connecting the buildings in the icon’s background. The Moldavian iconographer did not use this detail, but simply depicted the event in a two-dimensional space, not inside the house which would oblige a three-dimensional depiction. The iconographer tried to *transfigure* the space of the event into a ‘spiritual’ space by using the iconic technique of inverse perspective, thus inviting the viewer to take part in the pictorial event.

The fresco shows St. Anna recumbent on a bed covered with an ornate brown and yellow mat, fatigued after she gave birth to her child. Anna is depicted larger than the other persons, another technique used to show the *transfiguration* of the text into image. In iconography in general and this fresco in particular, the person closest to the viewer is not necessarily painted larger, as in the direct perspective technique. Rather, the person who is

⁴³⁹ Dimitri of Rostov, t. III, p. 101, *Christian Readings*, 1842: 395.

⁴⁴⁰ John of Damascus, “An Oration on the Nativity of the Holy Theotokos Mary,” p. 53 and 63.

semantically more important is depicted larger in order to indicate that person's importance in the narrative, and their implicit importance in the image.⁴⁴¹

St. Anna is a beautiful woman, yet her face betrays her old age. She wears a red toga and her head is covered. Her head is supported by her left hand and she seems to be contemplating the mystery that has taken place within her. Her right hand rests on her womb, and her index finger points to her daughter. She looks to the three young women who have uncovered heads, this detail indicating that they are Anna's servants. They offer her a plate and a vase, the practice of offering vases being customarily depicted in representations of the birth of imperial infants in Antiquity. According to Lafontaine-Dosogne, the origin of this detail has its roots in ancient depictions of imperial births.⁴⁴² Typically, the plate had on it three or four eggs, a symbol of fertility or fruit and of prosperity. On the right side, another young servant pours water from a jug into a large, typical Orthodox baptistery. The bath scene shows also a seated sage woman, whose left hand is uncovered, prepared for the ablution of the child, and whose right hand is ready to test the temperature of the water. On her knees sits the naked infant about to be bathed.

The Virgin, here a baby with adult features, has a halo and the initials of her royal title: Mother of God - MP ΘU. These initials alongside the fresco's title, *The Nativity of the Mother of God*, are part of the *insertion* of written words on frescoes. The initials MP ΘU reflect the decree of the Council of Ephesus held in 431 that declared Mary as the *Theotokos* (God-bearer, Mother of God).

The Council was called to solve the dispute over the teachings of Nestorius, then Patriarch of Constantinople, who objected to the term *Theotokos* attributed to the Virgin

⁴⁴¹ Egon Sendler, *op.cit.*, p. 146.

⁴⁴² Lafontaine-Dosogne, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p. 97.

Mary. Nestorius argued that Christ had both divine and human natures, with two separate hypostases, thus rejecting the conception of a hypostatic union in Christ. In Nestorius' opinion, the Virgin Mary gave birth to the incarnate Christ, not the divine Logos. Consequently, Mary should be called *Christotokos* (birth-giver of Christ), and not *Theotokos*, a distinction that implies that she gave birth, not to God, but only to the man Jesus.⁴⁴³ St. Cyril of Alexandria argued against Nestorius that Jesus Christ's two natures, humanity and divinity, are inseparable, that he is the God-man, fully God and fully human, two distinct natures in one Person. Hence, the Alexandrian theologian argued, Mary is to be called *Theotokos*.⁴⁴⁴ The Virgin Mary was the "workshop for the union of natures" as she provided the physical nature that enabled Christ to become fully human, at the same time that her virginity proclaimed his divinity.⁴⁴⁵ The Council of Ephesus, and consequently the whole of Orthodoxy, adopted the teaching of St. Cyril of Alexandria and regarded the teaching of Nestorius as heresy.

The initials MP ΘΥ speak about Mary as the Mother of God and are present in all icons depicting her, even if she is depicted as a little child, as in the fresco of her nativity.

In this fresco, the Virgin child is naked in the arms of a sage woman ready to bath her. Nudity is rare in Orthodox iconography. Besides Christ in the icon of his baptism, there are very few icons representing naked saints. Such exceptions include Mary of Egypt, several hermits, and Adam and Eve. In Orthodox iconography, these images do not have the sensuality of realistic art. The context idealizes and spiritualizes or transfigures the body and never creates the erotic feelings associated with nudity painted in a naturalistic

⁴⁴³ "The Nestorian Heresy and the Third Ecumenical Council," in St. John Maximovitch, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

⁴⁴⁴ Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, translated by John McGuckin (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), p. 77.

⁴⁴⁵ The expression "workshop for the union of natures" belongs to Proclus of Constantinople. See: Nicholas Constas, *Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity* (Leiden Brill, 2003), p.137.

manner. Thus, nudity does have a place in iconography, but the terrestrial aspect is rejected in preference for a symbolism of the bodies of saints as ‘temples’ where the Holy Spirit dwells.⁴⁴⁶

The scene of the bathing infant is ancient and can be seen frequently in Greek and Roman art. Lafontaine-Dosogne considers not only the bathing of the Virgin child, but also the bathing of the Christ child as “copies” from the ancient sources of this theme, which entered iconography during the eighth century.⁴⁴⁷ She holds that the scene of the bathing has as its inspiration the ancient model of bathing of illustrious persons.

The bathing of Mary might have influences from the example from the ancient world of the bathing of illustrious persons, since, according to her genealogy, both on her father’s side and that of her mother, she was of the royal line of King David.⁴⁴⁸ There are Nativity icons which depict the Virgin child emerging from a fountain shaped like a chalice similar to the depiction of the *Mother of God, the Life-Giving Source*.⁴⁴⁹ Her standing in a goblet reminds the viewer that she caused the ever-flowing River (Christ), who washes away the stain of sin, to gush forth. Thus, the Virgin child’s ritual bath in the fresco of the *Nativity of the Mother of God* reminds the viewer about the baptistery, the place where the catechumen is reborn to a new life in Christ.

The fresco of the *Nativity of the Mother of God* depicts the story of the last preparation of humanity to receiving the divinity since the Mother of God is perceived as the bound of union between the Old and New Testaments.⁴⁵⁰ In the Mother of God

⁴⁴⁶ Bigham, *Iconologie*, p. 112.

⁴⁴⁷ Lafontaine-Dosogne, *op.cit.*, vol.1, pp. 94-102.

⁴⁴⁸ *Synaxarion* 8 September, pp. 98-99.

⁴⁴⁹ Passarelli, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

⁴⁵⁰ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (Bronx, NY: Forham University Press, 1979), p. 147.

continues the sacred history of humanity and she is at one and the same time both “the fruit of the Law” and “the treasure-house of Grace.”⁴⁵¹ She is rooted in the Old Covenant, summing up in herself the sanctity of God’s Chosen People, and, at the same time, she is the Mother of the Son of God, by whose incarnation the New Testament came into being.⁴⁵²

In the fresco of the *Nativity of the Mother of God*, the iconographer did not depart from the iconographical archetype of the feast. Consequently, the contemporary viewer beholds the same image as did their ancestors, and the story shown in the picture follows the traditional representation of the nativity of the Mother of God.

6.3.8. Fresco 8: Anna Gives the Mother of God to Joachim

This rare depiction of the Virgin Mary’s family is immediately after the fresco of the *Nativity of the Mother of God*. The iconographer *transfigured* the sanctity of Sts. Joachim and Anna by depicting them haloed. By their live of prayer, Sts. Joachim and Anna pleased God, who blessed them to be the parents of Mary, the future Mother of the Incarnate God. In the fresco, Anna preciously carries the Virgin child and Joachim has his hands open to receive his daughter, in a gesture similar to a person’s readiness to receive God’s grace. Their gestures suggest their knowing, by the special revelation of God, that their daughter would be a light to the world and the beginning of renewal of human nature. For this reason they carry her carefully, as the one who was to be the Mother of God. They show their love for her not only as their long awaited daughter, but they revere her as their

⁴⁵¹ Nicolas Cabasilas, *Homilies on The Mother of God*, I, 3, edited, with a Latin translation, by Fr. Martin Jugie *Patrologia Orientalis*, vol. 19 (Paris, 1926), pp. 465-510.

⁴⁵² John Baggley, *Festival Icons for the Christian Year* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), p. 19, and Bradley Hanson, *Introduction to Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 32.

Lady. For that which alone is new under the sun, as John of Damascus asserts and as the frescoes show, is “that the culmination of miracles which is the Incarnation, had been prepared by means of miracles; for through Joachim and Anna it was offered a gift to the Creator which is more excellent than all (other) gifts, a holy mother who alone is worthy of the Creator.”⁴⁵³

The names of Sts. Joachim and Anna, *inserted* onto the fresco, are also an integral part of the liturgy and are always mentioned in the prayerful conclusion of services with the following:

May the risen Christ, our true God, with the prayers of his pure and holy Mother, the power of the precious and life-giving Cross, the protection of the spiritual powers of Heaven...the holy and righteous ancestors Joachim and Anna...and all the saints whose memory we celebrate have mercy on us and save us.⁴⁵⁴

Thus, the emphasis in the fresco is theological, the righteousness of Mary’s parents and God’s miraculous intervention in the reversal of their barrenness being a preparation of the way for the greatest mystery, namely the Virgin’s conception of a divine and human Son, as the following frescoes will show.

6.3.9. Fresco 9: The Blessing by the Priests

The fresco of the Virgin Mary receiving the blessing of the priests depicts her, Joachim, two priests, and a young man. Mary wears the *maphorion* (veil of the Mother of God), with her hands open to receive the priests’ blessing. St. Joachim carries the Virgin child and has his hands covered by his own cloak as sign of reverence before the future

⁴⁵³ John of Damascus, “An Oration on the Nativity of the Holy Theotokos Mary,” pp. 54 and 59.

⁴⁵⁴ Nicholas Cabasilas, *A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, translated by J.M Hussey and P.A McNulty (London, UK: SPCK, 1960), p. 22.

Mother of God, whom he serves.⁴⁵⁵ The sanctity of both St. Joachim and the Virgin child is *transfigured* in the fresco by means of haloes, which contrasts with the priests and the servant who are not haloed.

The fresco depicts the priests blessing Mary, as the *insertion* of the title reads. The blessing might be defined as a holy action which, combined with prayer, seeks God's grace. The blessing pronounced by priests of the Old Testament would be reserved for the High Priest in occasions of special solemnity (see Zachariah's blessing of the people in Luke 1:21).⁴⁵⁶ In the fresco, the priests bless Mary with both hands, as only bishops do in the Orthodox Church, their fingers forming the Greek initials for the name of Jesus Christ, IC XC. Thus, the iconographer depicts the blessing of Old Testament priests as foreshadowing that of the future Orthodox Christian priesthood.

The name of Jesus Christ, read from the shape of the priests' fingers, is a form of *insertion* of text onto an icon and witnesses to the importance of Christ name. The New Testament references to his name are too many to enumerate here, but four texts are of special importance. These are: "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth." (Php 2:9-10), "For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," (Acts 4:12), "Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you" (Jn 16:23-24), and "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to

⁴⁵⁵ As a rule in icons, the covering of hands is a sign of reverence which saints or angels have before the Mother of God or Jesus Christ. Ouspensky and Lossky, *op.cit.*, p. 165.

⁴⁵⁶ John Anthony McGuckin, *Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, vol. 1 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), pp. 74-75.

become children of God, to those who believed in his name” (Jn 1:12).⁴⁵⁷ Through the name of Jesus Christ, in the shape of the priests’ fingers, the fresco shows that the events unfolded before our eyes are part of the history of salvation.

Beside the theological dimensions that the frescoes unveil, there is also the narrative thread which continues from fresco to fresco. The narrative of the “Life of the Mother of God” continues with her first steps and is analyzed next.

6.3.10. Fresco 10: The Mother of God Comes to Her Mother Anna

The iconographer placed Mary’s first steps immediately after the fresco of the priests’ blessing. In this way, the iconographer emphasizes the importance of the priests’ blessing in contrast with the narrative of the *Synaxarion* and the *Protogospel*, where the precocity of Mary (her ability to walk at six months) is underlined. In the fresco, it looks as if Mary were waiting for the priests’ blessing in order to walk for the first time.

The fresco depicts the Virgin child, dressed as a small adult, advancing toward her mother, who is sitting on a bench with her arms outstretched to welcome her daughter. Mary and Anna are haloed, a sign of their holiness, in contrast with the servant behind Mary. The countenances of the three are depicted fully, a technique belonging to the realm of *transfiguration*. In iconography, persons are depicted as frontal or semi-profile, not in profile. Fotis Kontoglou, a famous icon painter, stated:

A spiritualized person cannot be depicted as incomplete, from his profile, because he has his soul filled with the glory of God and became in his wholeness light and

⁴⁵⁷ For a complex study on the power of the name in the Old and New Testaments, see: Lev Gillet, *Jesus Prayer* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), pp. 23-35.

likeness to God and this cannot be hidden. This is why the person (in iconography) turns entirely his face to the viewer.⁴⁵⁸

Profiling persons is rare and poorly drawn in iconography because the profile violates the circle of the face and distorts its perfection. If there are profiles, this indicates that the iconographer is ignorant, or that the persons portrayed are less important or evil. Examples of figures portrayed only in profile include Judas in the icon of the Last Supper and demons in the representation of the Last Judgment.

Space in the fresco is limited to the foreground and is closed off towards the background where buildings are usually illustrated. In this fresco, as in others presented above, there is a little spatial or three-dimensional illusion, the event represented taking place in the foreground. By enlarging the proportions of the buildings in the background, the iconographer makes them seem to belong also to the foreground. In order to avoid the representation of the event inside the house, which would necessarily require depth, the scene takes place outside. The architectural elements of the houses, the bench, and the pedestal under Anna's feet are depicted in inverse perspective, and even the parts of the building normally not visible are represented. Although the iconographer did not rigorously preserve the verticality of the buildings, he succeeded in giving the impression that the line of movement is from the interior of the fresco outward towards the viewer.

The written narrations say that, after ascertaining the precocity of her daughter, St. Anna decided to transform the Virgin's room into a sanctuary in order to avoid any impure contacts for her daughter. *The Withdrawal of the Theotokos in the Sanctuary of Her Room*

⁴⁵⁸ Constantine Cavarnos, ed. *Byzantine Sacred Art: Selected Writings of the Contemporary Greek Icon Painter Fotis Kontoglous on the Sacred Arts According to the Tradition of Eastern Orthodox* (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine & Modern Greek Studies), 1985, p. 97.

is not depicted at the church of Humor monastery. Instead, the iconographer depicted directly the scene of Mary's entry into the Temple at the age of three.

6.3.11. Fresco 11: The Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple

According to Alfredo Tradigo, the feast day of the *Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple* was added to the liturgical calendar on 21 November 543, the same day as the dedication to the Mother of God of a church in Jerusalem that was built by Patriarch Elias and financed by the emperor Justinian.⁴⁵⁹ Lafontaine-Dosogne argues that the feast was established in Constantinople by the patriarch Germanus (715-730), although the oldest document which mentions the commemoration of the feast on November 21 is the ninth-century Athonite Codex number 11 of the Saint Andrew Hermitage.⁴⁶⁰

The *Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple*, together with the *Nativity of the Mother of God* (September 8), the *Annunciation* (25 March), and the *Dormition of the Mother of God* (August 15) forms the group of the great feasts dedicated to the Mother of God. In the Orthodox Tradition, the *Nativity of the Mother of God* marks the first stage in the process of God's incarnation whereas her entry into the Temple seals her divine consecration. Once the feast came into the liturgical celebrations, iconography of the theme developed, not only in connection with the cycle of Mary's life, but also independently. One of the most ancient iconographical representations of this theme is the ninth century

⁴⁵⁹ Tradigo, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

⁴⁶⁰ Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie de l'enfance*, vol.1, p.137 and Andréas Nicolaïdès, "L'Église de la Panagia Arakiotissa à Lagoudéra, Chypre: Étude iconographique des Fresques de 1192," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* no. 50 (1996), p. 59.

fresco in the chapel Kizil Çukur in Cappadocia, and since the ninth-century the illustration of this feast spread to all Orthodox Churches.⁴⁶¹

The church of Humor Monastery has the *Entry into the Temple of the Mother of God* depicted three times: on the iconostasis as part of the row of the great feasts, in the narthex where lives of the saints for the month of November are illustrated, and in the *gropnita*.

In the fresco of the *gropnita*, the Virgin child, followed by her parents, walks toward the Temple. Her father, bent in reverence, has his left hand stretched out in a gesture of presentation of the Virgin to the High Priest, whereas her mother, points towards Joachim, . When Sts. Joachim and Anna brought the Holy Virgin to the temple, they offered to God a gift that was most pure, since the High Priest placed her in the Holy of Holies, “which was an unheard-of thing under the Old Covenant for only the High Priest was allowed to enter there once a year on the Day of Atonement.”⁴⁶²

There are also depicted the “daughters (virgins) of the Hebrews” who accompanied Mary to the Temple. Although the number of the daughters of the Hebrews is not mentioned in the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion*, the iconographer chose to portray seven. The medieval church gave great importance to numerical patterns, “considering number seven as a symbol of perfection because it was the sum of three, meaning divinity, and four, meaning created perfections.”⁴⁶³ Moreover, it was ascribed to “the number seven the symbolic meaning of totality, universality and inclusiveness.”⁴⁶⁴ Thus, in this fresco, the seven virgins might represent all of Israel participating at the entry of the Virgin Mary into

⁴⁶¹ Nicole Thierry, “Église de Kizil-Tchoukour, chapelle iconoclaste, chapelle de Joachim et Anne,” *Mon Piot* 50 (1958), p. 105.

⁴⁶² *Synaxarion* 21 November.

⁴⁶³ German Martinez, *Signs of Freedom: Theology of the Christian Sacraments* (Manhawah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), p. 50.

⁴⁶⁴ Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 145.

the Temple. The virgins are bareheaded except one who has her head covered with a veil. The first letter to the Corinthians says, “Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head” (1Cor 11:5), and in icons prophetesses or women of prayer are depicted veiled. In this fresco, the veiled woman has her left hand raised pointing towards Mary, which might be interpreted as a prophetic gesture.⁴⁶⁵

The Virgin child is portrayed as an adult but at a reduced scale, indicating her young age. Moreover, her hands are stretched out toward the High Priest awaiting his blessing. One sees her, in the same fresco, sitting on a throne on the right side of the baldachin which represents the Holy of Holies. In this fresco, the iconographer *transfigured* physical time. Events represented in icons in general and in the fresco of the *Entry into the Temple* in particular, are seen as transcending time and space. To express the transcendence of events, iconographers assemble and depict, in a single fresco, various sections that describe an event that unfolds in different times and places.⁴⁶⁶ Thus, one sees Mary at the entrance of the Temple as well as in the Holy of Holies, while an angel is offering her bread.

The angel flying towards Mary from the sky, having bread in his right hand and carrying a spear in his left hand, is the Archangel Gabriel. Although his name is not *inserted* onto the fresco, he is still recognizable because he is depicted according to the Painter’s Manual for the Archangel Gabriel.⁴⁶⁷ The bread in the angel’s hand

⁴⁶⁵ See the traditional depiction of the feast of the *Presentation of the Lord in the Temple* where prophetess Anna is depicted veiled and presenting Christ and his Mother.

⁴⁶⁶ For explanation of expressing the eternity in iconography, see: Constantine Cavarnos, *Guide to Byzantine Iconography: Detailed Explanation of the Distinctive Characteristics of Byzantine Iconography* (Boston, Mass.: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1993), p. 38.

⁴⁶⁷ See: *The Painter’s Manual*, p. 32(165) and the explanation of the depiction of the Archangel Gabriel in the fresco of Joachim in the wilderness.

symbolizes the celestial food which Mary received during the lengthy fasting which she underwent.⁴⁶⁸

If the event of the Virgin Mary's entrance into the Holy of Holies might be contested, since only the High Priest was allowed to enter once a year, from the Orthodox Christian point of view and from that of what the Mother of God means for this perspective, this event is true in a profound way. It is true theologically because the Virgin Mary received God in her womb and accepted to give God human nature. Thus, she is a symbol of the Holy of Holies.⁴⁶⁹ The Virgin Mary, by receiving God in her womb, became the Temple, God's dwelling place.⁴⁷⁰ This is why the liturgical hymns call her, the "Temple," the "living Church," and the "House of God," and also why the icon depicts her in the Holy of Holies.⁴⁷¹ In other words, the Mother of God had the most intimate knowledge of God, hence why iconographers depicted her in the Holy of Holies.

In the Orthodox Church, the Mother of God is the protectress of the *hesychastic* life (the life of prayer). She is therefore relevant for Moldavia, where monastic *Hesychasm* existed since the fourteenth century. The practice of *Hesychasm* became a monastic practice in Moldavia, due to *hesychast* Athonite monk Nikodemus, who was originally from Serbia.⁴⁷² In 1369, he went to Walachia and founded two monasteries, Vodita and Tismana. Some of his disciples went to Moldavia and founded the old Neamtu monastery.

⁴⁶⁸ There are icons where saints receive bread from angels during their fasting. See icons of St. Antony the Great and of the hermit Paul of Thebes.

⁴⁶⁹ James R. Payton, *Light from the Christian East: an Introduction to the Orthodox Tradition* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), p. 123-124.

⁴⁷⁰ Kathleen Coyle, *Mary in the Christian Tradition: from a Contemporary Perspective* (Leominster, England: Gracewing House, 1993), p. 24.

⁴⁷¹ David Drillock, John H. Erickson, Helen Breslich Erickson, eds., *The Divine Liturgy* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), p. 12; *The Festal Menaion*, p. 49.

⁴⁷² D. J. Deletant, "Some Aspects of the Byzantine Tradition in the Romanian Principalities," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 59 (1981), p. 3.

⁴⁷³ *Hesychasm* spread to all Moldavian monasteries and is practiced even today. The highest goal of *Hesychasts* is the mystical knowledge of God - union with God - and they consider the Mother of God as a perfect model of one who had the most profound union and knowledge of Him.

Hesychasm was championed by St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), a monk from Mount Athos and later Metropolitan of Thessalonika, who also compiled hesychast doctrines. Palamas' writings are "a development of the teachings of the Greek Fathers"⁴⁷⁴ concerning the knowledge of God, the life in Christ, Christ and deified humanity, symbols and realities, essence and energies, procession of the Holy Spirit, and Mariology, to enumerate only a few of the main aspects of his writings. In other words, *Palamism* is "a way of thinking able to safeguard the presence of God in history, his real fidelity to his Church, and his mysterious union – sacramental and mystical – with the community, the Body of Christ, manifest in the spiritual life of each Christian."⁴⁷⁵ To analyze the complexity of the *Palamism* is not the aim of this dissertation.⁴⁷⁶ However, it is important to discuss the nature of the divine light which the Apostles saw on Mount Tabor (one of the issues expounded in *Palamism*) which has influenced the iconographic depiction of the Apostles and of other saints. This light is not an exterior light, but it comes from within saints, and iconography depicts its shining on saints' countenance.

St. Gregory Palamas held that, through contemplative prayer (unceasing repetition of the Jesus Prayer, which is a memory of God and *not* a passive state), through

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁴ John Mayendorff, *A study of Gregory Palamas*, tr. George Lawrence, (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), p. 6.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁴⁷⁶ For an extensive analyze of Palamism, see: John Mayendorff, *A study of Gregory Palamas*, especially Part Two: "The Thought of Palama," pp. 116-241.

purification from passions and thoughts (purity of heart), and by the grace of God, *Hesychasts* attain to the true vision of God in His uncreated energies, as the Apostles experienced on Mount Tabor.⁴⁷⁷ Athonite monks, led by St. Gregory Palamas, had a confrontation with a group of Western theologians, led by Barlaam of Calabria, concerning the uncreated divine light the Apostles had seen on the Mount Tabor and which, in the view of the former group, was attainable by believers. The conflict over the nature of the light on Mount Tabor began when the Western theologians insisted that on Mount Tabor the Apostles had seen ordinary physical light whereas the Athonite monks claimed that the light is the uncreated divine energy. The Western theologians argued that only through reason and philosophy is it possible for one to obtain knowledge of God and that *Hesychasm* is a waste of time.

The Athonite monks argued that the one who practices *Hesychasm* effects the descent of the mind into the heart - a return into oneself - and might, through unceasing prayer, achieve the gift to contemplate the divine light. They also believed that prayer was not sufficient to see the light but that one needs to be in real sacramental unity with Christ. Otherwise, they maintain, there is only fallen humanity subject to error. Above all, the contemplation of the light is brought about by the sanctifying grace of God, manifested in the whole human being, that is in the soul as well as in the body. "It is within our body, grafted on the body of Christ by baptism and the Eucharist that the divine light shines."⁴⁷⁸

Moreover, St. Gregory Palamas held that one can have union with the light without mingling with it. This is one way to achieve "likeness" with God (according to Gen. 1:26), which is the equivalent of deification, to which man aspires. St. Gregory Palamas believed

⁴⁷⁷ See Saint Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* tr. Nicholas Gendle, ed. John Meyendorff (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), pp. 57-80.

⁴⁷⁸ Meyendorff, *A study of Gregory Palamas*, p. 152.

that the light on Tabor was only similar to physical light, but different in nature. He designated this light “uncreated energy” and differentiated between the essence and the uncreated energies of God. He argued that God is unknowable in his essence but that He can be known through his uncreated energies.

The *Palamite controversy* concerned not only the nature of the light on Mount Tabor, but the deification (the union) of humans with God.

In Orthodoxy, and particularly in Moldavia, the Mother of God is the protectress of Hesychasm, of the unceasing prayer and of the union of human beings with God. It is evident that one cannot (and it is not one’s mission to do this) attain the extraordinary situation of the Mother of God, but the aspiration of an Orthodox is to unify himself/herself with Christ, and the Mother of God is the most exceptional example of this union. Consequently, for the Orthodox person whose high aspiration is meeting God, the Mother of God is *par excellence* this meeting.

Nichifor Crainic, a Romanian writer, asserts that the Jesus Prayer, the prayer recited by the *Hesychasts*, is “the heart of Orthodoxy.”⁴⁷⁹ The author goes as far as to ascribe the invention of the Jesus Prayer to the Mother of God. Although there is no factual support for such a claim, this might be true in a mystical sense. The Jesus Prayer is practiced by monks/nuns, and also by Orthodox laity, who live their daily lives and at the same time recite this prayer.⁴⁸⁰ In its essence, the prayer is not believed to be a magical power formula, but gives attention to God’s presence, because “the name both invokes and evokes

⁴⁷⁹ Nichifor Crainic, “Rugăciunea lui Iisus,” *Gândirea* 17 (1938), pp. 217-224.

⁴⁸⁰ Cleopa Paraschiv and Mina Dobzeu, *Rugăciunea lui Iisus, unirea mintii cu inima și a omului cu Dumnezeu* (Fagaras, Romania : Agaton, 2002), p. 6.

the Presence [of God].”⁴⁸¹ Therefore, the Jesus Prayer guards the mind, cleansing it of vain thoughts and words lacking love, and, at the same time, it sanctifies the invoker’s own labour and daily life. Thus, in its essence, life becomes an extraordinary pilgrimage towards the place of one’s heart, towards this interior altar.⁴⁸²

The reading of the fresco is from left to right, which is natural for the continuity of the message of preceding frescoes and in analogy with the reading of the written texts. At Humor, as in other frescoes depicting the *Entry into the Temple of the Mother of God*, the reading of this fresco is inversed because the iconographer placed the altar towards the east (on the eastern wall), in the manner that altars are placed in churches.⁴⁸³ In the Orthodox Tradition, the church, if at all possible, is aligned with the altar facing east. The Moldavian iconographer in the fresco of the *Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple* placed the altar of the scene on the east side, though this meant reading the image in reverse, namely from right to left.

The next important events described in the *Protogospel* and *Synaxarion* are the election of St. Joseph to take care of the Mother of God and their meeting. The iconographer illustrated their meeting on a separate wall together with the meeting between the Mother of God and St. Elisabeth and the Virgin Mary’s enrolment to the census. Hence, the iconographer did not follow the order of the narration, but depicted the *Annunciation* directly after the *Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple*.

⁴⁸¹ Olivier Clément, *Three Prayers: Our Father, O Heavenly King, the Prayer of Saint Ephrem* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000), p. 18.

⁴⁸² Ignatius Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus* (Boston, Mss: New Seeds Books, 2006), p. 11.

⁴⁸³ Nicolaïdès, “L’Église de la Panagia Arakiotissa,” p. 63.

6.3.12. Fresco 12: The Annunciation

The iconic representation of the *Annunciation* generally follows the Gospel account at St. Luke 1:26-38. Up until the ninth century, iconography depicted the Virgin Mary standing at the moment of the Annunciation, but from the tenth century until today, she has been depicted more often as enthroned to emphasize her descent from the line of King David (Luke 1:27). Yet, there are exceptions to this traditional depiction of the *Annunciation*.⁴⁸⁴ According to Schiller Gertrad, only from the fifth century onwards did icons of the Annunciation contain certain motifs taken from accounts in the *Protogospel*, for, up until the fifth century, the icon was only a representation of canonical Gospel accounts.⁴⁸⁵ Schiller refers especially to the spindle in the Virgin's hand, an allusion to the *Protogospel* (10:1). This text recounts that the council of the priests decided to make a new veil for the Temple and that they divided the wool among eight chosen virgins, all of whom were from the house of David. The Virgin Mary, who was one of them, was given purple and scarlet wool, and this detail is depicted in many *Annunciation* icons.⁴⁸⁶

The *Annunciation* is present in Orthodox Churches on the row of the great feasts on the iconostasis, on the narthex walls, and on portable icons, and it is also the theme reserved for the royal doors of the iconostasis. The angel is depicted on the right door, whereas the Virgin Mary is on the left door, with the spatial separation between the two suggesting the meeting of two different spiritual worlds.

The Virgin Mary's varying attitude toward the Archangel Gabriel led to several different types of *Annunciation* icons. The first type is one in which the Virgin expresses

⁴⁸⁴ Nicolaïdès, "L' Église de la Panagia," p. 68. *The Painter's Manual*, p. 207 (165) specifies that Mary has to be depicted standing, thus we often see this type of representation.

⁴⁸⁵ Gertrad Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art* (London, UK: Lund Humphries, 1978), p. 34.

⁴⁸⁶ *Painter's Manual*, p. 207 (165).

her perturbation at the message which the Archangel brought to her from God. The second type depicts Mary with a sense of confusion and prudence, and turned away from the Archangel and raising her hand as to ward him off. The third type represents the Virgin's consent, as her palm is pressed to her breast in a gesture of acceptance of God's will and as her head is bowed in front of the angel. In all these cases, the *Annunciation* takes place inside the Virgin's house and has as its source the Gospel of Luke (1:26-38).

The *Annunciation* fresco from the church's *gropnita* does not follow any of the types referred to above. It is strictly the representation of the *Annunciation* as narrated in the *Protogospel of James*, which took place in the garden while the Virgin was fetching water. The garden is signified by a little tree at her left side. The Archangel came down from within a sphere, which is a symbol of the heavens. In his left hand is a spear, symbol of a messenger, as the Painter's Manual prescribes, whereas, with his right hand, he blesses Mary in the name of Jesus Christ, as the shape of his fingers indicates. The angel is dressed in a red cloak, symbolical of the fire of the divine glory from which he has been sent, and he has wings that symbolize his celestial and ethereal affiliation.⁴⁸⁷ Colors contribute greatly to the *transfiguration* of literary narration into iconic narration. In iconography, there is no color canon, but as Egon Sendler stated, the masterpieces of iconography indicate that color was of primal importance in the icon and that particular colors were applied to specific persons.⁴⁸⁸ In iconography, the angels are usually clothed in green, because green is the symbol of hope, youth and life. There are two sources for iconographers using green. First, in his book *The Celestial Hierarchy*, St. Dionysius the Areopagite explains the significance of four colors: "With regard to the multicolored

⁴⁸⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *op.cit.*, p. 190.

⁴⁸⁸ Egon Sendler, *op.cit.*, p. 150.

stones, these must be taken to work symbolically as follows: white for light, red for fire, yellow for gold, green for youthful vitality.⁴⁸⁹ The second source is Scripture, where green (*chloros* in Greek) expresses the life of vegetation (Isaiah 57:5; Mark 6:39; Revelation 8:7; etc) and, thus, it can be taken as symbolical of growth and fertility. The Moldavian iconographer chose to depict the angel in red, the color of love characterized by Pseudo-Dionysius as incandescent and active: “red is the power and sweep of fire.”⁴⁹⁰ It is the most ‘active’ of all colors, it moves out toward the spectator and imposes itself.⁴⁹¹ In this fresco, the angel’s red clothing stands out from the background of the image due to its vibrant luster that is not diminished either by shadows or by touches of white. Although the angel’s name is not *inscribed* on the fresco, he can be recognized as the Archangel Gabriel, the angel of the good news of the Incarnation of God.

The Virgin Mary is at the well with her pitcher inside it while water floats at the top. This is suggestive, as Frédérick Tristan holds, of the notion that from Israel comes forth Christ, the “new water”, or of Moses’ water in the desert that came out from a rock, which evocation is a foreshadowing of Christ, “the living water”.⁴⁹² Mary rests her left foot on a stone of the well. According to an ancient popular legend, several bits of dust from the stone, on which she rested her feet, were inserted into the *anaphora* of the first Christians.⁴⁹³ This popular tradition came from the time in which St. Helen, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, had erected a church in Nazareth on the site where it is believed

⁴⁸⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works (The Celestial Hierarchy)*, translated by Colm Luibheid (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 188.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁴⁹¹ For the technique of making colors to ‘come out’ from the frescoes, see: Sendler, *op.cit.*, p. 149-165.

⁴⁹² Frédérick Tristan, translated by Elena Buculei and Ana Bartos, *Primele imagini crestine (The First Christian Images)* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Meridiane, 2002), p. 240.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

the Virgin Mary was when the Archangel appeared to her in the garden.⁴⁹⁴ Through the detail of Mary resting her left foot on a stone of the well, the iconographer *transfigures* the narrative to reflect Orthodox teaching, which sees her as the bearer of the “living water,” the Mother of God.

Mary, facing in the direction of the angel, has her left hand raised with the palm turned towards the viewer. Her gesture is the sign of sovereignty characteristic of emperors and empresses, a sign of the glory she received from God.⁴⁹⁵ The gesture is also the *transfiguration* in fresco of Mary’s consent to give flesh to the Son of God, a gesture of acceptance, of submission: “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”(Luke 1:38)⁴⁹⁶ Her gesture explains that salvation is not only an act of God’s will, but also involves the free consent of human beings. Thus, Mary became God’s first co-worker.⁴⁹⁷ Through her gesture, the iconography of the *Annunciation* insists on Mary’s agreement as an indispensable condition of the Incarnation. Elisabeth Behr-Sigel suggests, and the fresco shows, that:

The participation of the humble handmaiden in God’s work is that of a created freedom as seen in the mysterious synergy, cooperation, dear to Eastern Christian thought: the divine and human wills work together.⁴⁹⁸

Mary’s obedient “let it be done to me” is the opposite of Eve’s disobedience in the garden of Eden. St. Justin Martyr names the Virgin Mary the “new Eve,” in parallel with Christ the “new Adam”, which theological custom is based on the Pauline doctrine of the second Adam: “since by man came death ... in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Cor

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 421-424.

⁴⁹⁶ Ouspensky and Lossky, *op.cit.*, p.172.

⁴⁹⁷ Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), p. 194.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

15:21-22).⁴⁹⁹ According to St. Justin, the Lord decided to accomplish the salvation of man by recapitulating or following the same process by which sin and death entered and perpetuated in humanity.

The Son of God became man through a Virgin, so that the disobedience caused by the serpent might be destroyed in the same way it had begun. For Eve, who was virgin and undefiled, gave birth to disobedience and death after listening to the serpent's words. But the Virgin Mary conceived faith and joy; for when the Archangel Gabriel brought her the glad tidings that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and that the power of the Most High would overshadow her, so that the Holy One born of her would be the Son of God, she answered, 'Let it be done to me according to your word' (Luke 1:38). Thus was born of her the Child about whom so many Scriptures speak, as we have shown. Through Him, God crushed the serpent, along with those angels and men who had become like serpent.⁵⁰⁰

The Virgin Mary, seen as the new Eve, is also at the core of the *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, written by St. Irenaeus of Lyons, who holds that just as Adam was recapitulated in Christ, so Eve has been recapitulated in the Virgin Mary:

Adam had to be recapitulated in Christ, so that death might be swallowed up in immortality, and Eve (had to be recapitulated) in Mary. So that the Virgin, having become another virgin's advocate, might destroy and abolish one virgin's disobedience by the obedience of another virgin.⁵⁰¹

In order to have a complete picture of what the fresco of the *Annunciation* means for an Orthodox Christian, this passage from a sermon on the *Annunciation* by Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow is significant:

In the days of the creation of the world, when God was uttering His living and mighty 'Let there be', the word of the Creator brought creatures into the world. But on the day, unexampled in the life of the world, when Divine Miriam uttered her

⁴⁹⁹ St. Justin the Martyr *Dialogue with Trypho* 100; PG6, 79-12.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰¹ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 33, SC62, pp. 83-86.

brief and obedient ‘So be it’, I hardly dare to say what happened then – the word of the creature brought the Creator down into the world.⁵⁰²

6.3.13. Fresco 13: Joseph Questions Mary

The *Protogospel of James* narrates that the Virgin Mary was six months pregnant when St. Joseph returned from his constructions and that he was distraught when he found her with child. He did not believe her claims of innocence until an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him about her innocence. Joseph was afraid that “maybe that which is in her be from an angel” (PJ 14:1). His fear might be related to the tradition coming from the book of Genesis 6:1-4, which mentions the “sons of God” who saw the daughters of men and bore children to them. In Frédéric Tristan’s opinion, the author of the *Protogospel* mentions this episode to avoid the misunderstanding of the Archangel’s visitation to the Virgin Mary, since Jews at that time - in contrast to Christians - could easily change the angelic salutation into an impiety.⁵⁰³

In the fresco, Joseph has his right hand pointing to the Virgin’s womb. The expression on his face betrays his tumultuous internal state, as in all the icons where he is portrayed (e.g, the *Nativity of Christ*). Joseph, overwhelmed by doubt, was highlighted in iconography, not only by the influence of the *Protogospel* account, but also by sermons by Church Fathers. For example Proclus, archbishop of Constantinople (d. 446), in a sermon on the Nativity, writes:

As the Virgin’s womb began to grow, so was Joseph’s heart wounded. He saw the swelling of the womb and forgot entirely the mystery of chastity. When he saw her

⁵⁰² Sermon 23 on the Annunciation, Moscow (in Russian), 1874, cited in Ourpensky and Losky, *op.cit.*, p. 172.

⁵⁰³ Frédéric Tristan, *op.cit.*, p. 242.

to be pregnant, he flew into a rage like a tempestuous and stormy sea. He saw that she was with child, and was convinced that she had been corrupted.⁵⁰⁴

Patriarch Germanos of Constantinople (d. 733) describes Joseph's doubts, in a sermon on the Annunciation, as a state of repulsion and wounded honour. Germanos has Joseph say:

Leave my home straightway and betake thyself to thy new lover! I do not intend to feed thee anymore! Thou wilt not eat the bread from my table, since, instead of joy, thou hast given me sorrow, disgrace, and dishonour in my old age!⁵⁰⁵

St. Joseph's suspicions ended when an angel explained in a dream that the child whom the Virgin is carrying is from the Holy Spirit and signalled the unexpected, namely that the child will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21, *Protogospel* 14:2). After this angelic revelation, St. Joseph's heart softened. Although he changed, the iconography depicts him in a state of suspicion and not in the peaceful state he had after he was freed from his former state by receiving the good news from the angel concerning the Virgin's innocence. Nevertheless, in icons Joseph is portrayed with a halo, which is the *transfiguration* in image of his sanctity.

The fresco entitled *Joseph questions Mary* shows the Mother of God in front of St. Joseph with open arms, defending her innocence. Her humbleness is apparent by the inclination of her head. As in all other frescoes, she has a blue dress under the brownish-red *maphorion* which covers her head and entire body. The colors of the Virgin's clothing contribute to the *transfiguration* of Marian dogma into a pictorial event. The iconographer used a brownish-red, a color which in Byzantine culture was originally reserved for the

⁵⁰⁴ Proclus is venerated as a saint in the Eastern Orthodox Church. His feast day is celebrated on November 20. *The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos: Viewed and Treated within the Framework of Sacred Scriptures, Holy Tradition, Patristics and Other Ancient Writings, Together with the Liturgical and Iconographic Traditions of the Holy Orthodox Church* (Buena Vista, CO: Holy Apostles Convent 1989), p. 136.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Byzantine emperor's clothing, to underline the *Theotokos*' royalty. The iconographer also used blue on her garments, a color characteristic of the mystery of divine life. Egon Sendler explains that "blue is the color of transcendence in relation to all that is earthly and sensual. The radiance of blue is the least sensual and the most spiritual of all colors."⁵⁰⁶ By using blue for her garments, the iconographer places the emphasis on the divine call of the Virgin to be the Mother of the incarnate God.

To the realm of *transfiguration* also belongs the semantic perspective (or the importance perspective). One sees in the fresco that the Virgin is larger than St. Joseph, although both are placed in the foreground. The iconographer placed her on a pedestal to emphasize the elevated status and significance of the Mother of God.⁵⁰⁷ Iconographers in general and the Moldavian iconographer in particular, knew to make distinctions in worship and expressed them in frescoes. Our iconographer venerated Joseph (he gave him *douleia*) and depicted him with a gold halo, but he venerated Mary with special veneration (*hyperdouleia*), though not as God (to God alone is due adoration, *latría*) but as the Mother of God, and he depicted her larger than Joseph and on a pedestal.

The Mother of God is rarely depicted pregnant, although her pregnancy was compared by the Fathers of the Church to an oyster bearing the pearl of Christ. Speaking of St. Anna, the Virgin Mary, and Christ, St. John of Damascus says:

Let the heavens rejoice on high and let the earth exult; let the sea of the world be shaken! For an oyster is born in her, the one who will conceive in her womb from the heavenly lightning-flesh of divinity and will bear the pearl of great price, Christ.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁶ Sendler, *op.cit.*, p. 155.

⁵⁰⁷ John Bagglely, *op.cit.*, p. 110.

⁵⁰⁸ John of Damascus, "On the Nativity of the Holy Theotokos," p. 59 and John, Monk and Presbyter of Euboea, "Homily on the Conception of the Holy Theotokos," p. 176, in *Wider than Heaven*. The metaphor of Mary the oyster and Christ the pearl has its roots in Syrian liturgical poetry. See: S. Brock, *The Luminous*

Another rare iconic depiction is *Testing Mary about Christ's Incarnation*, which continues the pictorial "Life of the Mother of God", presented in the following.

6.3.14. Fresco 14: A Test about Christ's Incarnation

The story of the Mother of God and St. Joseph drinking the water of conviction is not often depicted in the iconography of the "Life of the Mother of God" and never in isolation.⁵⁰⁹ The *Protogospel*, in ch.15-16, narrates how both the Virgin and St. Joseph drank of the "water of conviction" and remained whole without bodily symptoms, in contrast to those guilty of adulterous relations. The iconographer illustrated only the Mother of God's test of innocence, whereas Joseph, on the left side of the fresco, points towards her (similar to St. Anna) as an oratorical gesture proclaiming the Virgin's innocence.

The Mother of God is portrayed as humble and bowing towards the vessel containing the water of conviction, which is held by the High Priest. Humility is the fruit of wisdom, because as much as one comes closer to God one becomes wiser and sees one's own limits and cannot be proud any longer. Yet, the Mother of God came closer to God than anybody else by her acceptance of His will (as she communicated the humanity of the Incarnate God).⁵¹⁰ Moreover, the fruit of humility is obedience which must be something special since Mary became the Mother of God through obedience.⁵¹¹ Although knowing that she bore in her womb "the Son of the Highest" (Luke 1:32), in her deep humility she

Eye. The Spiritual World Vision of St Ephrem the Syrian (Rome: Corso Vittorio Emmanuele, 1985), pp. 106-108.

⁵⁰⁹ Holy Apostles Convent, *op.cit.*, p. 145.

⁵¹⁰ John Meyendorff, *op.cit.*, p. 147.

⁵¹¹ Mother Teresa, *Where There Is Love, There Is God* (New York, NY: The Crown Publishing Group, Random House, 2010), p. 264.

accepted the authority of the High Priest and obeyed when he asked her to be tested concerning her pregnancy.

The authority of the High Priest is highlighted by the Virgin's obedience, *transfigured* in the fresco by her bowing in front of him. The High Priest is St. Zachariah, and one recognizes him, not by the *imposition* of written texts, since his name is not mentioned on the fresco's title, but by his resemblance to the High Priest depicted in other frescoes presented above.

The *insertion* of the title on the fresco, *A Test about Christ's Incarnation*, underlines the iconographer's theological knowledge. The High Priest did not test Mary only to prove her innocence concerning apparent adultery, but to demonstrate that the Incarnation of God from a Virgin is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, the completion of the Law of Moses, and the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.⁵¹² After *A Test about Christ's Incarnation* and before the depiction of the *Nativity of Christ*, the iconographer depicted three frescoes of the Mother of God's meeting with the governor of Judea, St. Joseph, and St. Elisabeth, analysed below.

⁵¹² For the Orthodox teaching concerning the Incarnation as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, see: John Breck, *Scripture in Tradition: the Bible and its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), pp. 45-66.

**6.3.15. Fresco 15: The Enrolment in the Census of the Mother of God;
Fresco 16: Joseph Comes to the Mother of God;
Fresco 17: The Visitation**

Three frescoes, *The Enrolment to the Census of the Mother of God*, *Joseph Comes to the Mother of God*, and *The Visitation*, are depicted together on the walls of a polygonal column on the southern wall of the *gropnita* and show the meetings of different persons with the Mother of God.

The three frescoes are not depicted in the order of events narrated in the *Protogospel* or the *Synaxarion*, but are grouped together on the polygonal column, probably to underline that the governor of Judea, St. Joseph and St. Elisabeth, had the honour to privately meet the Virgin Mary, future Mother of God. The three frescoes might be a call to everybody, leaders of the secular world (the governor of Judea), men (St. Joseph), and women (St. Elisabeth) to venerate the Mother of God. From the Orthodox point of view, in the womb of the Virgin, God and man were joined and she was the one who served as the ladder for the Son of God who descended from heaven.⁵¹³ St. John Maximovitch writes:

If God the Father chose Her, God the Holy Spirit descended upon Her, and God the Son dwelt in Her, submitted to Her in the days of His youth, was concerned for Her when hanging on the Cross, then should not everyone who confesses the Holy Trinity venerate Her?⁵¹⁴

On these three frescoes, as in all frescoes where she is depicted, are *inserted* the initials of her title in Greek, MP ΘΥ, which affirms her as the Mother of God. These frescoes also depict three stars on her forehead and each shoulder of her *maphorion*, a

⁵¹³ St. John Maximovitch, *The Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God, the Birthgiver of God*, (Platina, Ca: St. Herman Press, 1996), pp. 25-26.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

symbol of her perpetual virginity: before, during, and after the Nativity of Christ. The three stars also symbolize the Trinity: the Father chose her, the Holy Spirit descended upon her, and the Son dwelt in her.⁵¹⁵

The Mother of God's perpetual virginity, *transposed* onto the fresco by the three stars, was constantly discussed and there were at least two different opinions. The first concerns the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Immanuel." The *Septuagint*, the translation of the Old Testament into Greek by Seventy Translators, uses the word *parthenos*, which means virgin, when translating the Hebrew word *almah*.⁵¹⁶ Other translations of the Old Testament into Greek, such as the second-century Jewish translator Aquila, or those translated by second-century Ebionites (they denied the divinity of Christ and his birth of a virgin) such as Symmachus and Theodotion, hold that the Hebrew word *almah* signified "young woman" and not "virgin" as the *Septuagint* had it.⁵¹⁷ The Orthodox Church holds that the Hebrew word *almah*, "unmarried woman," designates a hidden virgin, shut off from the occasional sight of men.⁵¹⁸ Moreover, John Maximovitch asserts that by a comparison of various passages in the Bible, the word *almah* signifies precisely virgin and "not only the Jews but even the pagans, on the basis of their own traditions and various prophecies, expected the Redeemer of the world to be born of a Virgin."⁵¹⁹ Maximovitch also cites the Archangel Gabriel's words to the Virgin Mary

⁵¹⁵ George Galavaris, "The Stars of the Virgin. An Ekphrasis of an Ikon of the Mother of God," *Eastern Churches Review* 1, no. 4 (1967-68), pp. 338-339.

⁵¹⁶ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008, Is.7:14 annotation 7:13-16.

⁵¹⁷ St. John Maximovitch, *op.cit.*, pp. 29-30. There are several translations of English Bible which have "young woman" and not "virgin" in Is.7:14, see: *Common English Bible*, *Amplified Parallel Bible*, *Good News Translation*, *New Life Version*, etc.

⁵¹⁸ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, Is.7:14 annotation 7:13-16.

⁵¹⁹ St. John Maximovitch, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

informing her, and later St. Joseph, of the birth of Christ by the Holy Spirit, and he also explains several Old Testament prophecies which prefigured the birth-giving of the Virgin.

The second opinion is of those who deny the Mother of God's virginity after giving birth. Tertullian was among those who believed that a real body, such as that of the Christ Child, could not have been born without destroying the Mother's physical virginity:

Virgin because she abstained from man; not-virgin because she gave birth.... Virgin when she conceived, she became a wife when she gave birth ... Who really opened her maternal womb, if not the one who opened the womb that had been closed (in his conception)? Normally, conjugal relations open the womb. Therefore, Mary's womb was all the more opened, since it had been more closed. Consequently it is more accurate to call her non-virgin than virgin.⁵²⁰

And also:

She was a virgin who gave birth to Christ, but after his birth she was married to one man, so that both ideals of holiness (namely, the virginal ideal and the married ideal) might be exemplified in the parentage of Christ, in the person of a mother who was both virgin and married to one husband only.⁵²¹

Consequently, Tertullian has no problem in seeing the 'brothers' of Christ mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew 12:33 and Mark 3:31 as normal sons of the Virgin Mary and Joseph, after the virginal conception of Jesus Christ.⁵²²

In the Orthodox Church, Mary is honoured as Mother of God (*Theotokos*), Ever-Virgin (*Aeiparthenos*) and All-Holy (*Panagia*).⁵²³ The title *Panagia* was never the subject of dogmatic definition, but was accepted and used by all Orthodox, whereas the first title, *Theotokos*, was assigned to her by the Third Ecumenical Council held in Ephesus in 431.⁵²⁴ *Aeiparthenos*, the belief in Mary's perpetual virginity, may seem contrary to Tertullian and

⁵²⁰ *De carne Christi* 23, 1-5 passim; PL 2, 835-36; see also : Gambero, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

⁵²¹ *De monogamia*, 8, 2; PL 2, 892.

⁵²² Gambero, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

⁵²³ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 262.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*

Scripture, since St. Matthew 12:46-47 and St. Mark 3:31-35 mentions the ‘brothers’ of Christ. But the word in Greek used here can mean half-brother, cousin, or near relative, as well as brother in the strict sense.⁵²⁵ Thus, in Orthodox assertion, the word ‘brothers’ of Christ mentioned in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark refers either to stepbrothers, Joseph’s sons by a previous marriage, or His cousins.⁵²⁶

Following the belief of the Orthodox Church and the iconographic tradition, the Moldavian iconographer *inserted* onto the three frescoes the initials of the *Theotokos* and, at the same time, *transfigured* the teaching of her perpetual virginity by painting three stars on the Mother of God’s *maphorion*.

The Virgin Mary will be accompanied by her title, *Theotokos*, and by the symbols of her perpetual virginity, not only in the frescoes analyzed above but in all frescoes and icons depicting her. The next fresco which follows in the pictorial narration of her life is the Nativity of Christ, presented below.

6.3.16. Fresco 18: The Nativity of Christ

The fresco of the Nativity of Christ, along with its name, is one of the most well preserved frescoes from the series depicting the “Life of the Mother of God.” The iconographer *inserted* onto it the traditional title of this major feast, the *Nativity of Christ*, and chose to depict the Nativity to mirror the canonical Gospels, the *Synaxarion*, and the *Protogospel*.

There are two classical depictions of the feast of the Nativity of Christ. The first model shows the Mother of God kneeling and adoring the Christ Child alongside St.

⁵²⁵ St. John Maximovitch, *op.cit.*, pp. 32-33; Timothy Ware, *op.cit.*, p. 236, note 1; *Synaxarion* 26 December Saint Joseph the Betrothed .

⁵²⁶ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, Mt.7:14 annotation 7:13-16.

Joseph, stressing that she did not have labour pains and, therefore, the virginal nature of the nativity and the divine origin of the baby.⁵²⁷ The second model depicts the *Theotokos* recumbent, showing her fatigued after giving birth and reminding the viewer of the undoubted human nature of the Child.⁵²⁸ This second model, used by the Moldavian iconographer, depicts the texts of canonical Gospels (Matthew 1:18- 2:12 and Luke 2:1-20) as well as elements drawn from the *Protogospel*, precisely the presence of two midwives at the Nativity of Christ.

The Mother of God is in the center of the fresco, larger than other persons, because she is seen as humanity's offering to God, an offering prepared by God to be the "living City of Christ and the Bridal Chamber made by God."⁵²⁹ This is a *transfiguration* in image of the "new Eve."⁵³⁰ She is the "renewal of all born on earth," and, as "the first Eve became the mother of all living people, so the new Eve became the Mother of all renewed mankind, deified through the Incarnation of God."⁵³¹ The Mother of God looks with sorrow and compassion towards St. Joseph, who is overwhelmed by his doubts.

St. Joseph is not next to the baby, but in the bottom left corner. According to André Grabar, this discreet pose was introduced by Christian iconographers to emphasize that Joseph had no direct involvement in the birth that has taken place and to show, indirectly, the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.⁵³² Thus, the fresco shows that St. Joseph was separated from the event of the birth of Christ. Just as it was necessary to have him away from the Virgin at the time of her conception, he was also absent at the moment of the

⁵²⁷ Ouspensky and Lossky, *op.cit.*, p. 159.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁹ Baggeley, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

⁵³⁰ Andréas, "L'église de la Panagia Arakiotissa à Lagoudéra," p. 74.

⁵³¹ Ouspensky and Lossky, *op.cit.*, p. 159.

⁵³² André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Washington: DC: Trustees of the National Gallery of Art, 1980), p. 130.

Child's birth.⁵³³ Separation does not mean indifference, it only points out the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, *Protogospel* 18 narrates Joseph's vision of time standing still when Jesus Christ was born. The message of St. Joseph's vision and of his "walk in spirit" is clear: the Nativity of the Savior has great historical importance. No wonder: nature ceased its course and time stopped at the moment when eternity entered into the world. Separated from the moment of the child's birth, St. Joseph was given to witness the miracle of the suspension of movement and time, and also to participate in it.

In front of St. Joseph stands Satan disguised as an old shepherd (there are icons where the shepherd has horns and a tail) who came to tell him that it is impossible for a child to be born from a virgin.⁵³⁴ There are icons where the person in front of Joseph is the prophet Isaiah, helping him to understand the mystery of Incarnation.⁵³⁵

Its primary message being the Incarnation, the fresco depicts, as the liturgical hymns declare, that:

...the revelation of Christ is now made manifest: the preaching of the prophets have received their fulfilment. For he of whom they spoke, foretelling His appearance in the flesh to mortal men is born in a holy cave and is laid as a babe in a manger, and as a child he is wrapped in swaddling clothes.⁵³⁶

In the fresco, the Lord's humanity is quite obvious, as one sees a new-born child placed in a manger. But the fresco does not show only a human birth; it *transfigured*, in image, the birth of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Thus, the child is depicted in white swaddling clothes. The color white, for its total absence of coloration, is closest to light itself that symbolizes divinity and purity. The child in swaddling white clothes

⁵³³ Bovon, *Studies in Early Christianity*, p. 226.

⁵³⁴ Ouspensky and Lossky, *op.cit.*, p. 160; and Evdokimov, *op.cit.*, p. 284.

⁵³⁵ Bagley, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

⁵³⁶ *Festal Menaion*, p. 199.

symbolizes Christ's divinity, as he is the light shining in the darkness of the world (John 1:5). In iconography, white is the color of Christ's garments in icons of the Transfiguration and the Resurrection, and of the angels who announced the Resurrection of Christ to the myrrh-bearing women.

Christ's divinity and his consubstantiality (unity of essence) with the Father is indicated also with the letters IC XC, abbreviating "Jesus Christ" in Greek, inserted next to the Child and the Greek letters O, Ω, N, on the Child's halo, meaning "I Am" the name used by God in Exodus 3:14 and in Christ's statement, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58). Yet, the crystallization of the dogma of Christ's divinity was established after a long and bitter debate. While the New Testament evidences the faith of the earliest Christian communities, in the creating-saving and sanctifying role of God as Trinity, the development of the sophisticated language of what Christians professed was hammered out in Church Councils in the fourth century: the Council of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople I (381). These two Councils were specifically directed to profound divisions throughout the Christian communities, because of the Arian controversy.⁵³⁷ Arius, a priest of Alexandria in Egypt, denied the divinity of Christ, and Emperor Constantine convoked the Council of Nicaea (in modern Turkey) to decide on this theological debate. Arius argued, against St. Alexander of Alexandria, that only the Father possessed divinity, being the Eternal One. Christ was first in Creation, the first of all creatures.⁵³⁸ St. Athanasius the Great, who succeeded Bishop Alexander as Patriarch of Alexandria in 328, focused all his intellectual gifts and his pastoral concerns in combating Arianism for the next 45 years. The debate concentrated on the relationship of equality and love between the Father and the Son, both

⁵³⁷ Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology*, second edition (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1990), p. 56.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

eternal, equally eternal, despite biblical metaphors like Father and Son. After St. Athanasius' death in 373, after long years of bitter division, the bishops of the Church came together again, this time in the new city of Constantinople, in 381 and proclaimed the Church's profession of God as Triune: Creator Father; Redeemer Son, and Sanctifying Spirit.

In the fresco, the letters IC XC and O, Ω, N, alongside the liturgical hymns, witness that Christ, the Son of God, is coeternal with the Father and that he came forth in the flesh from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.⁵³⁹

Christ's halo also has a cross. The cross represents death to the world. For Christians, the cross of Christ is the doorway towards everlasting life, as St. Athanasius states

On the cross he dies with arms outstretched: it was that He might draw His ancient people with the one and the Gentiles with the other, and join both together in Himself.... The Lord came to overthrow the devil and to purify the air and to make 'a way' for us up to heaven... It had to be done through death, and by what other kind of death could it be done, save by a death in the air, that is, on the cross? Here, again, you see how right and natural it was that the Lord should suffer thus; for being thus 'lifted up,' He cleansed the air from all evil influences of the enemy. 'I beheld Satan as lightning falling,' He says; and thus He re-opened the road to heaven, saying again, 'Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors.' For it was not the Word Himself Who needed an opening of the gates, He being Lord of all, nor was any of His works closed to their Maker. No, it was we who needed it, we whom He Himself upbore in His own body—that body which He first offered to death on behalf of all, and then made through it a path to heaven.⁵⁴⁰

The Cross, the cave, the manger, and the swaddling clothes foreshadow Christ's death, burial, the sepulchre, and the burial clothes.⁵⁴¹ He is in a manger, which is associated with the sepulchre or the altar, the antithetic perspective of the present, Nativity-Incarnation, and of the future Sacrifice-Salvation. "Christ comes in His love for mankind,

⁵³⁹ *Festal Menaion*, Cantic Five-Irmos, pp. 126-127.

⁵⁴⁰ St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, translated by Robert W. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 54.

⁵⁴¹ Ouspensky and V Lossky, *op.cit.*, 1982, p. 157.

to save the man He fashioned thus, paradoxically, “He who bears the whole world in the hollow of His hand, is wrapped in swaddling clothes and received as guest in a narrow manger.”⁵⁴² The manger is in a cave, and beyond the manger are an ox and a donkey. These details are depicted in every icon of the Nativity and are seen as a fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah: “The ox knows his owner and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know Me, and the people do not understand Me” (Isaiah 1:3). The cave *transfigures* in fresco the wilderness where manna, the symbol of the Eucharist, was given.⁵⁴³ Manna is only a symbol of the Eucharist, but it is very different because, while the manna was taken as an aid against hunger, as Christ said “your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and are dead” (John 6:49), the one who receives the true manna, the Eucharist - Christ’s body and blood - has eternal life.⁵⁴⁴

Above the Christ Child, in the center upper side of the fresco is a star, formed by three united rays that point towards the child. This is the star that led the magi to find and worship the newborn King of the Jews (Matthew 2:1-12). The magi, depicted on the upper left side, are shown as men of different ages, a *transfiguration* in image of the belief that the revelation of God is for people at any age.⁵⁴⁵ The Magi were first depicted in the *Synaxarion* of Basil II (976) as kings with crowns on their heads, whereas, before 976, they were shown as non-Christian priests.⁵⁴⁶

The Magi present gifts to the infant Christ: gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2:11). The symbolism of the three gifts is explained in apocryphal writings from the third

⁵⁴² *Festal Menaion*, The feast of the Nativity of Christ, Vespers, p. 201 and Canticle Eight, Irmos, p. 208.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁵⁴⁴ Tadrus Y. Malaty, *Christ in the Eucharist* (Orange, Ca: Orthodox Christian Center), 2001, p. 62.

⁵⁴⁵ *Festal Menaion*, p. 159.

⁵⁴⁶ I.D. Stefanescu, *Iconografia artei byzantine si a picturii feudale romanesti* (Bucuresti: Editura Meridiane), 1973, p. 96. For information on Basil’s *Synaxarion*, see above the short history of the *Synaxarion*.

and fourth centuries. Upon expulsion from Paradise, Adam took with him three gifts symbolizing three conditions he had available to himself in Paradise: gold for royalty, frankincense for the sacerdotal status and myrrh for prophecy.⁵⁴⁷ However, for Christians, the significance of the three gifts is different from Adam's primordial stages. Referring to these gifts Frédéric Tristan interpreted them as gold for the royalty of Christ, frankincense for his priesthood and myrrh for anointing him before his entombment (meant to underline his human condition).⁵⁴⁸ In the Old Testament, myrrh was indeed used in preparing the anointing oil (see the instructions for the preparation at Exodus 30:23-26). Oil was employed for anointing the Tent of Meeting, the ark of Testimony, and for Aaron and his sons in consecrating them as priests. In Orthodoxy, the interpretation of the myrrh Christ received as gift is that he was given a special anointment: he is the Anointed One, the Holiest for his triple titles of Priest, King and Prophet.⁵⁴⁹

In the fresco at Humor, the magi are replaced by three priests of the Old Testament, identifiable by their *phylacteries* similar to the phylactery of the High Priest depicted on the first fresco analysed above. Now, the three Old Testament priests foreshadow the New Testament priests, since they worship and bring their gifts to Jesus Christ. The different ages of the priests might signify that “the priestly function of offering is exercised by the entire priestly people. ‘You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light’” (1 Peter 2:9).⁵⁵⁰ Or, the gifts are offered in liturgy.

⁵⁴⁷ Tristan, *op.cit.*, p. 252. Tristan mentions several apocryphal writings, among them: *The Book of Seth, The Mages' Star, Adam and Eve's Battle Against Satan, etc.*

⁵⁴⁸ Tristan, *op.cit.*, p. 252.

⁵⁴⁹ Nicolas Cabasila, *The Life in Christ* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press), 1974, p. 111.

⁵⁵⁰ Paul Meyendorff, “Offering You ‘Your Own of Your Own’, Stewardship in the Liturgy,” in Anthony Scott ed., *Good and Faithful Servant* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), p. 61.

Thus, liturgy, as the Greek word *leitourgia* implies, is the common work of the entire people of God.⁵⁵¹ In participating in Eucharistic liturgy, remembering God's saving activity and by making their offering, the people perform their priestly role given to them at baptism.⁵⁵² Thus, those who received Christian baptism became members of Christ's body, and, through baptism, every Christian comes to share in the priesthood that belongs to Christ.⁵⁵³ Nevertheless, the Eucharistic offering is sacrificial, and sacrifices are the business of priests.⁵⁵⁴ Hence, those who bring gifts are depicted as priests.

On the upper right side opposite the priests who are offering gifts, there are two angels with their hands covered – a sign of reverence for the newborn Child. Also, a shepherd sings to the Child, a transposition in the fresco of the account of the meeting between angels and shepherds, and their worship of the Lord (Luke 2:8-18).

Beneath the scene of the shepherd, symmetrical with the place occupied by Joseph, is the scene of the ablution of the Child. Over time, this scene was erased in some churches and replaced with one of the shepherds or bushes. There was an opinion that this scene was a debasement of Christ, who had no need of washing, since he was born in a miraculous manner. Stéphane Bigham holds that this scene was erased from very important churches on Mount Athos: in the principal church of Big Lavra, in the chapel consecrated to Saint Nicholas in Stavronikita Monastery, and in the church of Saint Dionysiou Monastery.⁵⁵⁵ He also argues that this erasure was a consequence of the influence of the Catholic school at Karyes (capital of Mount Athos), during the years 1636-1641, and of Jesuits, who wanted

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., p. 161.

⁵⁵² Ibid., p. 161.

⁵⁵³ Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press), 1974, 94-99; and Paul Meyendorf, "The Liturgical Path of Orthodoxy in America," *St. Vladimir's Quarterly* 40 (1996), pp. 55-58.

⁵⁵⁴ Paul Meyendorf, "Offering You 'Your Own of Your Own', Stewardship in the Liturgy," p. 162.

⁵⁵⁵ Bigham, *op.cit.*, pp. 99-102.

to convert the Orthodox monks from Mount Athos to Catholicism.⁵⁵⁶ This was not the only reason why the ablution scene of the Child was removed. At Mount Athos, an all-male monastic establishment, there was a view that the bare arms of the sage woman show a physical beauty and that this could produce trouble to the soul, hence the decision to erase the scene.⁵⁵⁷ Be that as it may, in my opinion, the scene might have been erased simply because it comes from the apocrypha and not a canonical source. However, most Nativity icons, and the fresco from Humor, retain the scene of the ablution, showing that the newborn Child is under natural human laws and needs everything that other newborns need. In this way, iconography stresses that through the Incarnation God took upon himself all the weaknesses of human nature, all, that is, except sin.

The scenes included in the Nativity depiction took place at different times but are united in the fresco in an attempt at abolishing physical time. The goal was the transposition of the Nativity into eternity, since its significance is timeless. The multiple scenes are linked together by yellow-ochre hills, which almost touch the sky. The entire fresco calls for joy because it depicts the Incarnation of God. Christ, the incarnate Son of God, destroyed the fear of death and brings humankind the joy of the promised eternity. The pessimism of the Ecclesiast's words, "God is in heaven and you are on earth" (Ecclesiastes 5:1), is replaced with the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah's hope "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down..." (Isaiah 64:1). Liturgical hymns and the fresco of the Nativity of Christ remind us that no one is excluded from sharing in the happiness of this feast.⁵⁵⁸ The saint exults as he draws near to victory, men and women are

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁵⁵⁸ *Festal Menaion*, The feast of the Nativity of Christ, Canticle Three, p. 205.

glad that they are called to forgiveness, everybody is called to life, and the whole of creation welcomes the Incarnate God.

After the Nativity of Christ is the fresco of the *Synaxis of the Mother of God*, analyzed next.

6.3.17. Fresco 19: The Synaxis of the Mother of God

The image of the *Synaxis of the Mother of God*, called also the *Mother of God Enthroned*, is connected with the celebration of the Mother of God on December 26, the day following the Nativity of Christ. Its majestic solemnity harmonizes well with the dogma of the Council of Ephesus (431), which established the divine maternity of Mary, thus proclaiming her as *Theotokos*. The *Synaxis* generally depicts the Mother of God gathering a multitude of saints, prophets, angels, emperors and hierarchs around the throne upon which she sits with the Child on her lap.

In the Moldavian fresco, she gathers under her protection the emperors of the Byzantine Empire, the two in front row being Constantine (272-237) and Justinian (527-65), and then the monastic assembly. Behind the two emperors is a young emperor who seems to be Prince Rares. This is likely the case for two reasons. First, the countenance of the young emperor is very similar to Rares' depiction on the votive painting where he and his family are giving the church of Humor Monastery to Christ, through the intercession of the Mother of God (see p. 70). Second, in all icons Emperor Constantine, considered in the Orthodox Church as equal to the Apostles, and Justinian, an exemplary Christian monarch, are haloed. If behind Constantine and Justinian is Prince Rares, they cannot be depicted with halos, because Rares was not declared a saint by the Church. Moreover, the

iconographer could not depict two Emperors each with a halo and Rares without, as he would be wicked, which he was not. Thus, the iconographer chose to depict all three Emperors without halos. Although, we cannot confirm incontrovertibly that the young emperor is in fact Rares (because of lack of documentary evidence), it is evident, nevertheless, that the image underlines that the Mother of God is ‘the defender of Constantinople,’ since two Byzantine emperors are depicted next to her throne. The emperors have their arms open in prayer towards their *palladium* (safeguard).⁵⁵⁹ She gave victory in battles to Byzantine emperors against their enemies, once even showing herself in a visible fashion to St. Andrew the Fool-for-Christ (d. 936), in the church of Blachernae, spreading her veil over the people present in that church and praying for Constantinople, which at that time was under military threat.⁵⁶⁰

In the fresco of *Synaxis*, the Mother of God is not only the patron of Byzantine emperors, but, by virtue of her virginity, she is also the protectress of monks and nuns who chose the life of chastity. The monastic assembly at the left of the Virgin might be that of the Humor convent, since they are not haloed, and because they dedicated the monastic church to her.

The Mother of God, seated on a throne, is holding the Christ Child in her lap and shows him to the emperors and the assembly of monks. Before her, the Child blesses the

⁵⁵⁹ For the Mother of God seen as the defender of Constantinople and intercessor for Byzantine emperors, see: Alexei Sivertsev, *Judaism and Imperial Ideology in Late Antiquity* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 93-104. On the military function of the *Theotokos*, see: Averil Cameron, “Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium,” *Past and Present* (1979), pp. 18-24; Anatole Frolov, “La dédicace de Constantinople dans la tradition byzantine,” *Revue de l'histoire des religions* (1944), pp. 61-127.

⁵⁶⁰ While praying at the Blachernae church, St. Andrew saw the Mother of God between Sts. John the Baptist, John the Theologian, and several other saints, spreading her veil over the people in the church. In the Orthodox Church, the feast of the *Protection of the Mother of God*, also named the *Virgin Mary's Cerement*, is commemorated on October 1 (in Slavic languages, the word “cerement” has a dual meaning of “veil” and “protection”). Paul Evdokimov, Michael Plekon and Alexis Vinogradov, *In the World, of the Church: a Paul Evdokimov Reader* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press), 2001, p. 122.

monks and emperors with two hands, just like a High Priest. He has adult features, implying that, even though he lived as an ordinary child, he was also divine. He wears an outer royal dark red garment interwoven with fine gold lines that make the fabric as impalpable as light. Christ's inner garment is white and on his right shoulder is a yellow ribbon, a mark of his divine royalty.⁵⁶¹

The *Synaxis of the Mother of God* was often seen as an echo of John of Damascus' words: "Her hands carry the Eternal One, and her lap is a throne more sublime than the cherubim."⁵⁶² Because she is more "sublime than the cherubim," she is portrayed in a larger size than the emperors and monks surrounding her and the Child. The throne on which she sits resembles a temple, with windows and columns, while the *exedra* on the back suggests an apse. In Tradigo's interpretation, the throne becomes a metaphor of the Virgin who is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, God's home.⁵⁶³ The red cloth uniting the two towers from the background is the Protecting Veil maphorion of the Virgin, recalling the representation of the vision of St. Andrew the Fool-for-Christ in the church of Blachernae.⁵⁶⁴

On the middle upper side of the fresco, above the Mother of God, is a star. In André Grabar's opinion, the presence of the star represents the influence of pagan and imperial imagery over the Christian iconography, where a star symbolized the astral existence of the persons above whom it was placed.⁵⁶⁵ Yet, more probably the iconographers of the *Synaxis of the Mother of God* might derive their star from the Gospels that mentions the star of Bethlehem. Moreover, the star in the Humor fresco has three white rays *transfiguring* in

⁵⁶¹ Tradigo, *op.cit.*, p. 244.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁵ Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, pp. 132-133.

color the Trinitarian work of the Incarnation - God the Father who chose the Virgin Mary, God the Holy Spirit who descended upon her, and God the Son who dwelt in her - and two red rays suggesting the two natures of Jesus Christ, human and divine.

There are many meanings addressed in the fresco depicting the *Synaxis of the Mother of God*. On the one hand, it maintains what the previous frescoes showed, namely that Mary is the Mother of God and that the Child in her arms is Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate. On the other hand, it shows the Mother of God as the model for those who chose a life of chastity while she is also, at the same time, the protectress of Byzantine emperors as well as of 'her' city, Constantinople. It also subtly reminds us of Prince Petru Rares' hopes to be the liberator of Constantinople.

The next two frescoes, the *Flight into Egypt* and the *Return from Egypt*, depict two events that took place in the life of the Mother of God and of her Child, and will be analysed next.

6.3.18. Fresco 20: The Flight into Egypt
Fresco 21: The Return from Egypt

The frescoes of the *Flight into Egypt* and the *Return from Egypt* are almost identical. In the first, the Mother of God with the the Christ Child on her lap is riding a donkey, whereas St. Joseph is leading the donkey, and behind him is his son St. James. The second scene pictures their return from Egypt, again with the Mother of God riding a donkey, but this time she has her arms extended towards the Child, who is now carried by St. Joseph on his shoulders. The Theotokos, as in all other frescoes, is dressed with the maphorion inscribed with three stars. The Christ Child is portrayed blessing with two

hands, and, as in the fresco of the *Synaxis of the Mother of God*, he wears a white garment partially covered with a mantle interwoven with fine gold lines.

One of the differences between the two frescoes is that in the first St. Joseph flees whereas in the second he is walking back from Egypt. These details are based on two pericopes from the Gospel according to St. Matthew (Mt. 2:12; 2:20): in the first, an angel advises Joseph to *flee* to Egypt with the Holy Family, whereas in the second, he said to Joseph to *go* to the land of Israel.⁵⁶⁶

Joseph took care of the Holy Family when they fled to Egypt and also when they returned to Israel. St. John Chrysostom emphasizes that:

The elderly Joseph is not offended at hearing that he must flee home, family and occupation and fly, secretly, as a fugitive. He was a man of faith. Note that he does not make inquiry when he might return from dwelling in a strange land, although the angel had spoken in an indefinite manner. Neither was he regretful at the command, but submissive and obedient, bearing these trials with cheerfulness.⁵⁶⁷

In the fresco of the return from Egypt, St. Joseph has Christ on his shoulder, evidence of his kindly care towards the Child. The fresco is also a depiction of Hosea's prophecy (11:1) and of the New Testament application of this prophecy in the Gospel of St. Matthew (2:15): "Out of Egypt I called my Son."⁵⁶⁸ This speaks about Israel being brought

⁵⁶⁶ Mt. 2:13: An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying 'Arise take the young Child and His mother, *flee* to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word: for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.'; Mt. 2:20: Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, 'Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and *go* to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead.'

⁵⁶⁷ Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, edited by Philip Scharff, D.D. and LL.D., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1975), Homily VIII, p. 52.

⁵⁶⁸ St. Matthew did not use the Septuagint version (his children), but rather a Hebrew manuscript which had the singular "my Son." See: *The Orthodox Study Bible*, note on Hosea 11:1.

out of captivity, but in the New Testament (Mt. 2:15) and in the fresco, the Child fulfills this call as the true Son of God by coming out of Egypt.⁵⁶⁹

The two frescoes *transfigure* God's *kenosis* - self-emptying. Through the Incarnation, God emptied himself and chose to enter our human world, not as a powerful hero, but as an infant, physically vulnerable and totally dependent on others for his security and well being.

The next fresco, the *Anapeson*, also speaks about God's *kenosis*, and will be analysed below.

6.3.19. Fresco 22: The *Anapeson*

Next to the frescoes of the Return from Egypt is the depiction of Christ "reposing" (*Anapeson*). The *Anapeson* is the depiction of liturgical texts, based on Genesis 49:9, which speak about Christ who sleeps as man but who is awake as God.⁵⁷⁰ Since the thirteenth century, it was often depicted in Greek and Balkan churches, but the earliest depiction of Christ *Anapeson* is in the Utrecht Psalter (9th century).⁵⁷¹ The classical *Painter's Manual* of Dionysius from Fournas does not describe how this image is to be depicted. The Moldavian iconographer probably used a pattern for its depiction since the *Anapeson* was depicted in several churches erected in the fifteenth century. In the fresco at the church of Humor monastery, the Christ Child is partially lying down on a pallet and is flanked by an angel and his mother. The angel, holding the instruments of Jesus' future crucifixion, appears to

⁵⁶⁹ *The Orthodox Study Bible*, note on Mt. 2:15.

⁵⁷⁰ Buculei, "Programul iconographic al gropnitelor moldovenesti", p. 90.

⁵⁷¹ Maria Vassilaki, Mouseio Benakē, *Mother of God: Representation of the Virgin in Byzantine Art* (Milano, Italy: Skira Editore, 2000), p. 151.

be teaching Mary the meaning of the Passion.⁵⁷² In this interpretation, the image of *Anapeson* prefigures Christ's death.⁵⁷³

The iconographer did not arbitrarily choose this theme to be represented in the *gropnita* which is a burial chamber. In Orthodoxy, the faithful who die are called "asleep in the Lord."⁵⁷⁴ Thus, the fresco's message is that God will take care of people in their death just as he takes care of a vulnerable, sleeping, innocent child.⁵⁷⁵ The fresco also speaks about the reality of the Incarnation of the Son of God, who, like all human beings, needed rest.

Beyond the Mother of God is depicted a prophet pointing towards her. Since the figure of the prophet does not have his name *inserted* above him, he can be variously interpreted. On the one hand, seeing the stars on the fresco's background, one might think that the prophet is Balaam who foretold: "A star shall rise out of Jacob; and a Man shall rise out of Israel" (Nm. 24:17). On the other hand, the prophet might be Isaiah, the prophet par excellence of the Messiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and you shall call his name Immanuel" (Is. 7:14). It seems more accurate to identify the prophet as Isaiah, since he points towards the Mother of God.

The *Anapeson* is the last fresco depicted on the *gropnita*'s western wall. There are two other frescoes, the *Prayer of the Mother of God on the Mount of Olives* and *Joachim's*

⁵⁷² Hans Belting, Edmund Jephcott, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 287 and 290.

⁵⁷³ Robert G. Ousterhout, Leslie Brubaker, *The Sacred Image East and West* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), p. 155.

⁵⁷⁴ John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), p. 229.

⁵⁷⁵ Constantine Cavarnos, ed. *Byzantine Sacred Art: Selected Writings of the Contemporary Greek Icon Painter Fotis Kontoglous on the Sacred Arts According to the Tradition of Eastern Orthodox* (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine & Modern Greek Studies, 1985), p. 105.

Sacrifice to the Temple, placed on the *gropnita*'s northern wall. They close the series of frescoes depicting the "Life of the Mother of God" and will be analyzed next.

6.3.20. Fresco 23: The Prayer of the Mother of God on the Mount of Olives

According to Nicolae Cartoian, the image of the *Prayer of the Mother of God* is a depiction from the *Apocalypse of the Holy Mother of God*, where are described the *Theotokos*' intercession prayers for the dead.⁵⁷⁶ On the one hand, this might be true, since the fresco is depicted in the *gropnita* where are placed the graves of several founders of the monastic establishment. On the other hand, the fresco might be a depiction of the Virgin's prayer for Moldavia, because its title, "Mother of God, your prayer on the mountain" (presumably the Eleon mountain, in Cyrillic: "Богородица, твоя молитва в гора"), does not necessarily refer to her prayers for the dead. In accordance with the Orthodox Tradition, the Mother of God often went to the Mount of Olives to pray, not necessarily for the souls of the dead, but because there was the place where she witnessed the Ascension of Christ:

O Lord, having fulfilled the mystery that was hidden from before the ages and from all generations (...) you came with your disciples to the Mount of Olives, having together with you the one who gave birth unto you, the Creator and Fashioner of all things; for it was meet that she who, as your Mother, suffered at your Passion more than all, should also enjoy the surpassing joy of the glorifying of your flesh. (The Ascension, Great Vespers).⁵⁷⁷

In the *gropnita* of Humor church, the depiction of the Mother of God in prayer may be thought to be consonant with Prince Rares' purpose of liberating Constantinople and

⁵⁷⁶ Nicolae Cartoian, *Cartile populare in literatura romaneasca. Epoca influenței sud slave* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedica Romana, 1974), vol.1, pp. 93-103.

⁵⁷⁷ On the Mount of Olives as Mary's place of prayer see: Carl S. Tyneh, *Orthodox Christianity: Overview and Bibliography* (Nova Science Publishers, 2003), p. 133; Solrunn Nes, *The Mystical Language of Icons* (Cambridge, UK: W. B. Eerdmans, 2004), p. 87.

protecting Moldavia from the Ottoman peril. This view might be true since the church of Humor Monastery is the only place where the Mother of God is depicted in an intensive prayer, on the same series of frescoes the Byzantine Emperors venerate her and on the walls of the same church where there is depicted ‘her city,’ Constantinople, defended by Moldavian soldiers. Are these clues sufficient to link the fresco with Prince Rares’ hope to be the liberator of Constantinople when there is no specific reference to him in the *inserted* text on the fresco? Indeed, the fact that Prince Rares made military alliances in the hope of liberating Constantinople from the Ottoman occupation, together with his demand for prayers to Athonite monks alongside the frescoes just mentioned, gives some credence to the argument that the fresco depicts the Mother of God in interceding prayer for Petru Rares and his Moldavia.

6.3.21. F24: Joachim’s Sacrifice to the Temple

The series of frescoes depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” conclude with the accepted gifts of Sts. Joachim and Anna. There is the victory of injured innocence of Sts. Joachim and Anna by God’s ‘reversal’ of their barrenness into fruitful parenthood. They received a daughter, the future Mother of God Incarnate. The fresco shows that God hears people’s prayers and that he answers them, as was the case for the Virgin’s parents. Sts. Joachim and Anna bring their gifts to the Temple, and this time they are accepted. It is true, God has no need of gifts since He is rich without them, but he is pleased to accept people’s offerings when they are presented as an expression of their love and thankfulness. As a participant in Sts. Joachim’s and Anna’s joy, the gaze of St. Zachariah rests on the Virgin Mary, who will give birth to God Incarnate, for whose veneration he will later

receive the crown of martyrdom. Not only are Sts. Joachim and Anna's prayers fulfilled, but so is St. Zachariah's prayers for redemption of peoples' sins (see Fresco 1), because a Virgin was born who will give birth to Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29).

6.4. Conclusion

A detailed analysis of the iconographical composition of the "Life of the Mother of God" reveals the iconographer's focus on a central theological issue, that is, God's plan for salvation. In using the "Life of the Mother of God" as a specific case study of the broader outlines of God's saving plan for humanity, the artist concentrates on the canonical, as well as on apocryphal, literature which represents the lived experience of the Christian faith, so important for Christian faith, liturgy and spirituality. The iconographer concentrates on those elements of the canonical and apocryphal writings that emphasize elements of God's saving plan. One of the central elements of the plan of salvation is that everything is in the hands of a loving God whose gracious attention to humanity calls upon the sending of the Messiah, His beloved Son, to enter into human history.

One of the consistent features of that plan is the series of 'reversals' of human expectations. Did Prince Rares expect a reversal on the stage of world politics by the intercession of the Mother of God? This is probable, since he hoped to be the liberator of Constantinople and the Emperor of Byzantium. We find the series of reversals announcing God's action in human history explored in the narrative of the life of the Mother of God. We find it first in the element of the human response to God's offer of participation in the very life of the Trinity, in the liturgy itself where the community gathers around its priestly

representative and offers their prayers and their life's work in the rituals of the Temple as a foreshadow of the rituals of the Church. The artist encapsulates his whole composition in the community gathered in communal prayer around their High Priest. Here, the reversals are studied in the composition. A childless man brings gifts before the community and his gifts are refused. That is the introduction to the narrative of the frescoes, but at the end we see the same High Priest receiving the gifts of the same man who is no longer barren. An inversion has taken place where an aged couple, childless before, are now the blessed parents of the Virgin Mary.

The series of reversals are very clear throughout the frescoes. First, we have the barrenness of Sts. Joachim and Anna replaced by a blessed fertility in their child. Yet, not only is there the reversal of the barrenness of Joachim and Anna, but also that of St. Zachariah the High Priest and St. Elisabeth, whose own blessed child, St. John the Baptist, 'recognized' the Messiah even in his mother's womb by leaping for joy (the fresco of Visitation). The second reversal is more profound because here, for the first time, we have virginity itself transformed into motherhood without human intervention. This is the narrative of the pregnancy of the Virgin, and this is the narrative of the anguish of St. Joseph. The Virgin Mary, by receiving God in her womb, became the ideal of the union with God and, at the same time, the Temple, God's dwelling place.

We find this greatest reversal, the Incarnation, the entry of God into human history, the birth of the Saviour, underlined in the fresco series. We have seen indications within the frescoes of the awareness of the paradox of Christ's birth and of his central role in the history of salvation which includes the Passion and Resurrection, the paradox of life from death, which is the ultimate reversal. The preliminary reversals of barrenness changed to

fertility, and later of virginity (which remains such) to motherhood, are pointing to the great reversal of death changed to life in the Resurrection (themes depicted in detail on the nave's walls).

In the *gropnita*, the iconographer had concentrated on Mariology, and we see first of all the Virgin's consent to give flesh to God, a gesture of acceptance, of submission. However, salvation is not only an act of God's will, but also involves humankind by the Virgin's free consent of her faith, thus becoming God's first co-worker. Her participation in God's work is that of a mysterious synergy, or cooperation, of the divine and human wills. By the virtue of the paradox of virgin motherhood, the Mother of God is also depicted as the protectress of the monastic communities and, at the same time, as the patron of Byzantine emperors. At the end of the series of frescoes depicting her life, the Mother of God is in an intense intercessory prayer for those who ask her for help.

The contribution to Mariology of this fresco series is a remarkable gift of a little church hidden away in a Moldavian monastery, but that is now acknowledged on the worldwide cultural stage by the UNESCO proclamation. This theological jewel of Mariology deserves wider publicity and acknowledgement by the international community, as well as within the church communities of both East and West.

7. GENERAL CONCLUSION

In a hilly area of northern Moldavia is located the Humor Monastery, a treasure of Romanian culture. Built in the sixteenth-century, the monastery flourished under princely patronage, but the monastic community was disbanded in 1774, when Austrians occupied Moldavia. It was not until 1990, after the fall of Communism in Romania, that the monastery was reborn as a convent for Orthodox nuns. In 1993, a new phase of its long and turbulent history has begun by its recognition as one of UNESCO's architectural monuments. While the beauty of the church, which is the focus of its monastic setting, is obvious to all who are drawn to this monument, what is not so obvious is the cultural, political and theological impetus that lay behind the striking quality of its architectural and iconographical innovations.

The church of Humor Monastery was built under the rule of Prince Petru Rares (1527-1538 and 1541-1546), who also founded many other Moldavian churches and monastic establishments, and who provided financial support for some monastic dwellings on Mount Athos, Greece. His generosity might be seen as an expression of his devout Orthodox faith, but it can also be linked to his political interests. Rares naively hoped to be the liberator of Constantinople from the Ottoman Turkish occupation. In order to achieve his purpose, he tried to establish military alliances with other Christian countries and asked monks to pray to the Mother of God for his victory. Above all, however, he commissioned the construction of churches dedicated to the Mother of God, traditionally held as the protectress of Constantinople. Moreover, extensive series of frescoes praising her were painted on the interior and exterior walls of the churches, the most outstanding example being the church of the Humor Monastery. Here, one of the exterior frescoes, the

Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God, is linked with the battle for Constantinople where, paradoxically, Moldavians are victorious over the Ottomans Turks. Prince Rares hoped for a reversal on the world political scene, and this is what the Moldavian iconographers depicted in this fresco. Although Constantinople was conquered in 1453 by the Ottoman Turks, and although the Ottoman Empire achieved a climax under the rule of Suleiman the Magnificent (1520 – 1566), Rares, prince of a tiny country, hoped to become the liberator of Constantinople. He believed that his political ambition could be realized if the prayerful intercession of the Mother of God, prayerfully besought, would intervene in human history to reverse the political situation.

This hoped-for reversal on the stage of world politics is unique in Moldavian iconography. Yet, the uniqueness was not limited to the exterior frescoes, but it is imprinted on the interior frescoes and the church's architecture as well. While the architecture of the church of Humor Monastery became a precious Moldavian monument due to an acute sense of harmony, proportion and innovation, the architecture itself gave iconographers the opportunity to find ingenious solutions for interior and exterior decorations of the church's walls. Alongside the depiction of the New and Old Testaments, they took the liberty to include in the frescoes apocryphal writings, details from the *Synaxaria*, local traditions, legends, beliefs, and the political aspirations of Prince Rares.

In the first part of the dissertation, I analyzed the historical circumstances of the cultural impetus that lay behind the beauty of Moldavian architectural and iconographical innovations in general and of the Humor monastic church in particular, whereas in the second part, I gave careful attention to the placing in the church's *gropnita* - a church architectural innovation in itself - of the visual narrative of the "Life of the Mother of

God,” a fresco series apparently unique to Moldavian iconography.

Art historians consider the *Protogospel of James* as the ultimate source for the images depicting the life of the Virgin Mary. Yet, until recently among theologians, the traditional way of analyzing the icons has been to look at the canonical books, and not at the apocrypha, as possible written sources of inspiration for icons. Traditionally, the *Synaxarion* itself has been given focal attention when dealing with depiction of saints’ lives. The originality of my dissertation is that I have provided a comparative study of the series of frescoes depicting the “Life of the Mother of God” with the *Synaxarion* and the apocryphal *Protogospel of James*. After comparing the sequence of the narratives and the content of the frescoes and the literary sources, I conclude that the frescoes are depicted creatively by the iconographer, yet related to both narratives. Moreover, major Orthodox feasts such as the *Nativity of the Mother of God*, the *Entry into the Temple of the Mother of God* and the *Nativity of Christ*, were depicted in a traditional manner in the fresco series, with the notable exception of the *Annunciation*, which is depicted precisely as described in the *Protogospel of James*. Since the *Synaxarion* is depicted in the narthex of all sixteenth-century Moldavian churches, what lay behind the iconographer’s decision to create, for the first time in Moldavia, a series of frescoes sourced in the *Protogospel of James* alongside the *Synaxarion*?

While the answer might be found in the Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest, where there is a thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Protogospel of James* written in Greek, possibly unique to Romania, we cannot conclusively confirm that this particular manuscript is the precise literary source of the frescoes. The dissertation is not an attempt to establish whether or not the thirteenth-century copy of the *Protogospel of James* of the

Romanian Academy Library is the literary source for the frescoes. Neither is it an analysis of the *Synaxarion* or of the *Protogospel*. Rather, it is a comparison of the fresco series and the narrative sequences describing the same events in these two sources to establish which best could serve as textual sources for the frescoes.

Finally, this dissertation is not a study of the liturgical hymnography for commemorations of the Mother of God - from her conception to her Dormition - or patristic and later homilies bearing on Mary's biography. The focus of the research lies elsewhere, in the interaction between historical events, artistic creativity on the part of the iconographer, and the theological interpretation of the life of the Mother of God as an illustration of the loving interventions of God in history, in a word as a theology of grace.

The detailed analysis of the iconographical composition of the "Life of the Mother of God" reveals the iconographer's focus on a central theological issue, that is, God's plan for salvation. One of the central elements of the plan of salvation is that everything is in the hands of a loving God whose gracious attention to humanity calls upon the sending of the Messiah, the Second Person of the Trinity, to enter into human history. One of the consistent features of that plan is the series of 'reversals' of human expectations. On the series of frescoes depicting the "Life of the Mother of God," there are depicted three 'reversals' of human expectations. The change from barrenness to the fruitfulness of parenthood of Sts. Joachim and Anna is obviously an important 'reversal' in the theological structure of the fresco series. But there is a further development of the theme, the prophetic announcement of their child's role in the salvation history. Their daughter Mary, a virgin, gave birth to the Son of God. This second 'reversal' is the ultimate paradox of human expectation. That the Son of God should assume human nature while remaining truly and

fully divine is the supreme ‘reversal’ of all expectation. This theological jewel of Mariology is a remarkable gift of a little church in a Moldavian monastery, given to the international community both East and West. It is precisely this astonishing theological reinterpretation of an ancient Christian source by a sixteenth-century Romanian iconographer that has been analyzed and which has not been given any proper attention until now.

Was Prince Rares aware of the ‘reversals’ in God’s plan for salvation of humanity? This is probable, since he expected a ‘reversal’ on the stage of world politics for the salvation of Christendom from Ottoman occupation. Moreover, he saw in himself the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the liberator of Constantinople and the future Emperor of Byzantium. It is striking that the *Fall of Constantinople*, depicted on the exterior church wall of Humor Monastery, shifts from disaster to the victory of Moldavians soldiers over the Ottoman Turks. The narrative of unexpected reversals is central in the theological composition of the fresco series of the *gropnita*.

The frescoes studied in this paper could never have existed if Prince Rares had not provided the iconographer with the monastic architectural location, as well as the liberation of the mind and the vocation to go to what is central, to the Mother of God’s intercession for Moldavia and his ruler. Because Prince Rares provided the actual setting and incentive, the iconographer had a place to express himself in a work of art of amazing originality directly in line with traditional sources going back to early generations of Christianity. Prince Rares’ sense of mission inspired and provided the opportunity for the artist to manifest himself in the frescoes as both a theologian and an artist. This is something that

needs a wider recognition and on-going research projects. My research is a beginning and calls for future consideration from both Eastern and Western researchers.

The UNESCO recognition of the artistic treasure of the Humor Monastery was an important moment in recent Moldavian history. This recognition has obviously encouraged cultural tourism, as well as the specialists' efforts in the restoration and preservation of this unique monument. At the same time, it is important for the Christian community in Romania. Today, one can see a vital community of nuns at the monastery, and they are not alone with their treasure, but the faithful fill the church for each liturgy. However, the naming of the Humor Monastery as part of worldwide cultural treasures points to another aspect of this research, and that is to extend a broader opportunity in both East and West to speak of a spiritual and theological treasure that is to be found within the walls of a monastic church, particularly the unique artistic expression of a sixteenth-century iconographer concerning profound theological issues. Thus, the dissertation points to the need for exploring avenues to making it better known. The whole process of the research has underlined that this is an initial stage to drawing the attention of the wider community in both East and West, and, particularly, that of specialists in art, architecture, theology and history.

In the present dissertation, it is clear that there have been three important areas that called for careful research. The first need was for an elaboration of the historical circumstances which provided the context for the frescoes series. Whatever the ambiguity of the political career of Prince Rares, it is important to acknowledge the impact of his personal decisions as well as his politics, not only in Moldavia, but as an ideological, religious and political battlefield between European countries and the ambition of the then

new and expansionist Ottoman Empire. The wider historical context that calls for further research is the position of the buffer states in the Balkans in the religious conflicts of the Reformation and the post-Reformation, and the expansion of Islam in that period.

Second is the specific theological context. The frescoes do not belong to an isolated world, but to a world that was impacted from East and West on political grounds, on imperial expansionist grounds, and within sixteenth-century religious turmoil. It is fascinating to see all of these aspects alive within the visualization of Orthodox theology in general and of Mariology in particular, in the frescoes of the Humor monastic church.

The research focusing on the interpretation of the iconographical program of the Humor monastic church draws attention to the impetus for innovation that is remarkable in this period. It might have been a short period, but it was remarkable for architectural innovations and iconographical innovations that provided the creative opportunities assumed by the *gropnita*'s iconographer. This anonymous artist of sixteen-century Humor, in an innovative architectural setting, was also innovative in his freedom for selecting from textual sources how to communicate his awareness of the importance of the Virgin Mary's role in the plan of salvation. Not only do we find the importance of the Mother of God's role in the exterior walls of the church, on the narthex of the church, or of the nave, but we find it in this particular new setting which is the *gropnita*. This material space offered the iconographer a particular liberty to express his theological vision of the *Theotokos* and of her role for Orthodoxy and Moldavia.

Finally, I believe that the frescoes are not only the product of a renewed vitality within the monastic setting of the Moldavian church community, but also that a careful study of the underlying theological and spiritual ideas of the frescoes calls for a creative

response in the twenty-first century. This call could mark a return to a deeper appreciation of central theological questions of God's plan of salvation and the role of the Mother of the Incarnate God celebrated in the liturgy, in the spirituality, and in the artistic representations of the Christian church both East and West.

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9. APPENDIX 1: The Series of Frescoes Depicting the “Life of the Mother of God”

Picture 44: F1 The Tabernacle of the Old Testament of the Jews



Picture 45: F2 Joachim Gives His Gifts to the Temple



Picture 46: F3 The Angel of the Lord Appeared to Joachim in a Desert



Picture 47: F4 Anna Prays in Her Garden



Picture 48: F5 Joachim and Anna Praying at a Distance from One Another



Picture 49: F6 The Kiss of Joachim and Anna



Picture 50: F7The Nativity of the Mother of God



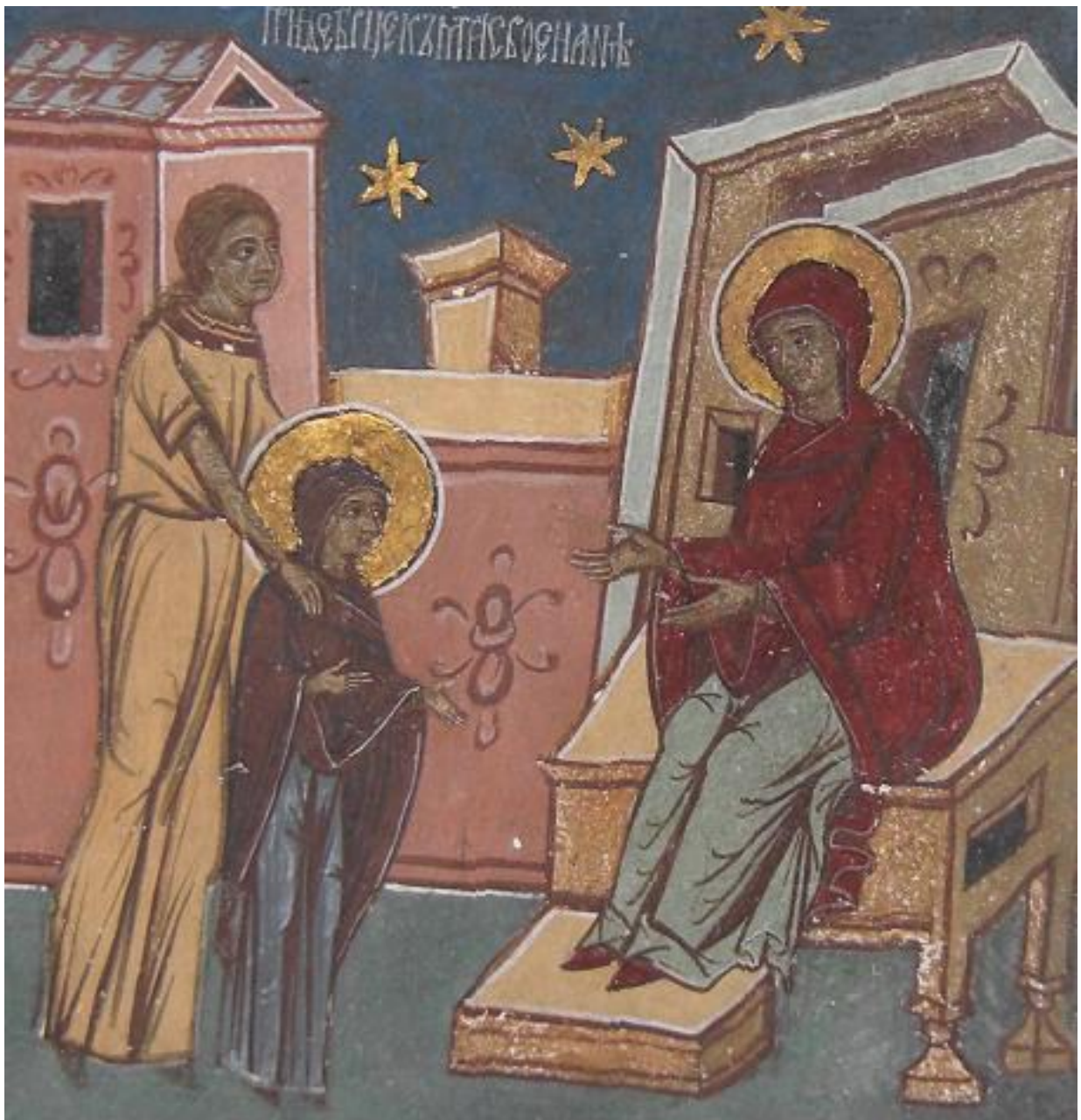
Picture 51: F8 Anna Gives the Mother of God to Joachim



Picture 52: F9 The Blessing by the Priests



Picture 53: F10 The Coming of the Mother of God to Her Mother Anna



Picture 54: F11 The Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple



Picture 55: F12 The Annunciation



Picture 56: F13 Joseph Questioning Mary



Picture 57: F14 Testing Mary about Christ's Incarnation



Picture 58: F15 The Enrolment in the Census of the Mother of God



Picture 59: F16 Joseph comes to the Mother of God



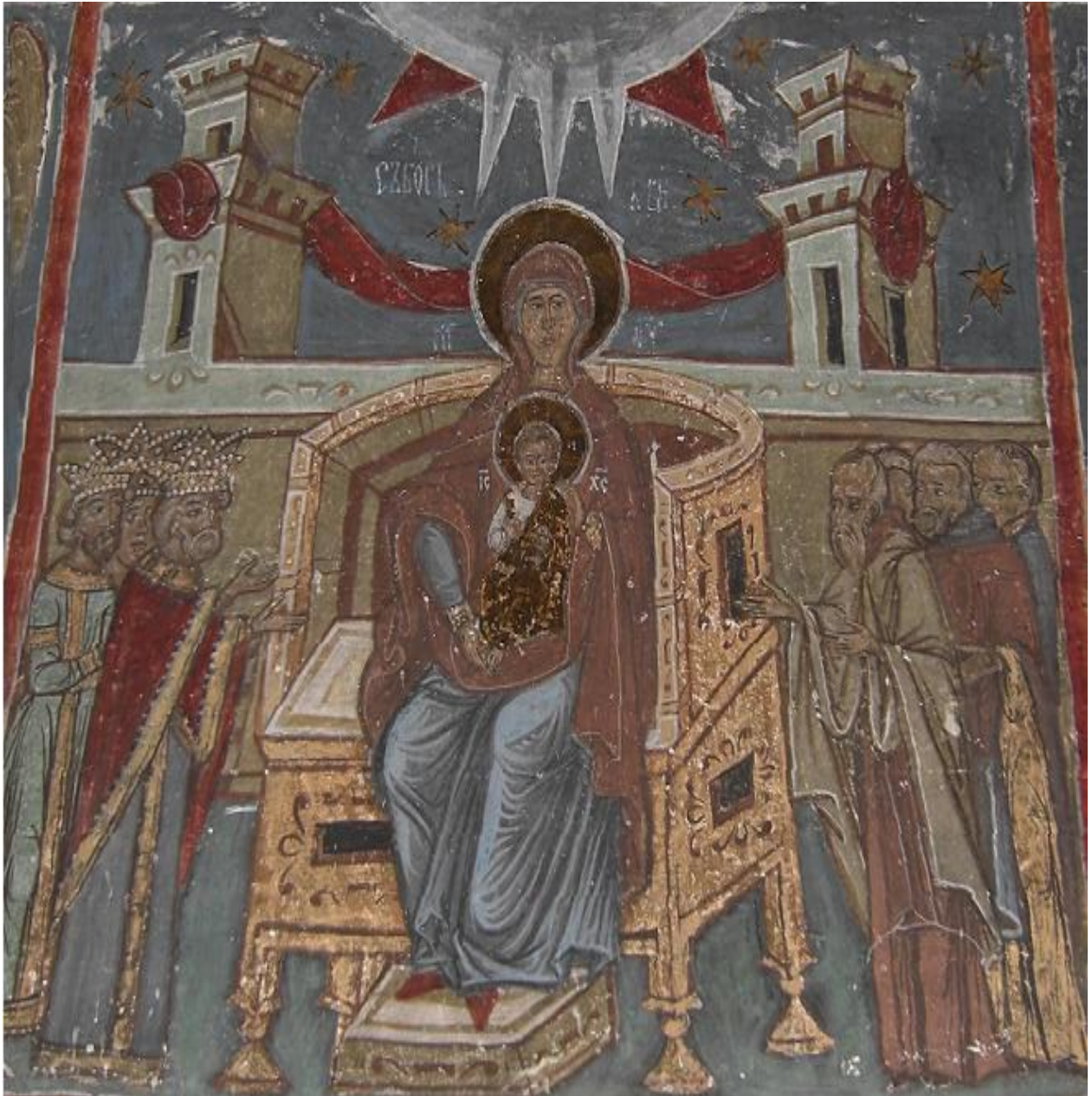
Picture 60: F17 The Visitation



Picture 61: F18 The Nativity of Christ



Picture 62: F19 The Synaxis of the Mother of God



Picture 63: F20 The Flight into Egypt



Picture 64: F21 The Return from Egypt



Picture 65: F22 The Anapeson



Picture 66: F23 The Prayer of the Mother of God on the Mount of Olives



Picture 67: F24 Joachim's Sacrifice to the Temple



10. APPENDIX 2

Synaxarion: 8 September, 9 September, 21 November, 9 December, 25 December, 26 December, 25 March and 24 June

Synaxarion 8 September **Nativity of our Sovereign Lady the most Holy Mother of God and ever Virgin Mary**

¹Man was made by God and placed in Paradise that his sole care might be to bring forth good fruit and to contemplate God his Creator through His works. ²But Adam was driven out of the garden of delights through the envy of the Devil, who deceived Eve the first woman, and caused Adam to sin. ³Later God gave the Law to men by Moses, and made known His will by the Prophets, in preparation for the greater blessing of the Incarnation of His only Son, the Word of God, who would deliver us from the nets of the Evil one. ⁴In taking our nature upon Himself, Christ wished to share fully our fallen state but without sin, for he alone is without sin, being the Son of God. ⁵For this reason, he prepared for Himself a spotless habitation, an immaculate ark, the Most Holy Virgin Mary, who, although she too was subject to death and condemnation of our first parents, yet she was chosen by God before all ages to be to be the new Eve, the Mother of Christ the Saviour, the well-spring of our redemption and the archetype of all Christian holiness.

⁶On her father's side, the Most Holy Virgin Mary was of the royal line of David through his son Nathan who begot Levi, who begot Melchi and Panther, who begot Barpanther, who begot Joachim who was the father of the Mother of God. ⁷Anna, the wife of Joachim, was also of David's lineage for she was the grand-daughter of Mattha, who was himself the grandson of David through Solomon. ⁸Mattha married a certain Mary of the tribe of Judah, and they had a son named Jacob, the father of Joseph the carpenter, and three daughters, Mary, Sobe and Anna. ⁹Mary gave birth to Salome, the midwife, Sobe to Elisabeth the mother of the Forerunner, and Anna to the Mother of God.

¹⁰God in his wisdom observed the barrenness of human nature before the coming of Christ by leaving Joachim and Anna childless until they were very old. ¹¹Joachim, who was both rich and devout prayed without ceasing, and offered gifts to God that he would deliver his wife and himself from their reproach among men. ¹²One feast day, he (Joachim) had gone to the Temple to present his offering, when one of the congregations of the tribe of Reuben turned to him and said: 'You are not allowed to offer with us because you have no child.' ¹³Those words cut Joachim to the heart and instead of returning home, he went up into a mountain alone to pray and weep while, ¹⁴at the same hour, Anna too was shedding abundant tears and fervently imploring Heaven. ¹⁵Our God, who is rich in mercy and full of compassion, heard their entreaties and sent the messenger of His benevolence and herald of our salvation, the Archangel Gabriel, to Anna. ¹⁶He announced that she would conceive in her old age and bear a child, who would be the praise of the whole earth. ¹⁷Full of joy and amazement she exclaimed: 'As the Lord my God lives, whether the child I bear be a son or a daughter, I will consecrate it to the Lord my God to serve Him all the days of its life.'

¹⁸ Joachim too was visited by an Angel and told to lead his flocks homeward, and to rejoice with his wife and their entire house, because God had determined to put an end to their reproach.

¹⁹ When nine months had passed, Anna gave birth, and asked the midwife: ‘Whom have I brought into the world?’ ²⁰ ‘A daughter’, she replied. ²¹ ‘My soul has been magnified this day,’ exclaimed Anna and gently laid down the child. ²² And when the days of her purification according to the law were accomplished, she arose, washed, gave suck to the child and called her Mary, the name obscurely awaited by the Patriarchs, the Prophets and the Righteous, and by which God would reveal the mystery hidden from all eternity.

²³ The child grew strong and her mother placed her on the ground when she was six months old to see if she would stand up. ²⁴ Confidently Mary took seven paces and then turned back and clung to her mother’s breast. ²⁵ Anna lifted her up saying, ‘As the Lord my God lives, you shall tread on the ground no more until I take you into the Temple of the Lord.’ ²⁶ Her mother kept the room where the child was as a holy place, and no unlovely or unclean thing entered there, and she brought daughters of Hebrews of pure lineage to play with the child.

²⁷ When the child was one year old, Joachim gave a great feast. ²⁸ He invited the priests, the scribes, and all the Council and people of Israel. ²⁹ He presented Mary to the priests, and they blessed her, saying ‘God of our fathers, bless this little child, and give her an everlasting name to be named of all generations.’ ³⁰ And all the people responded ‘Let it be so, let it be so! Amen.’ ³¹ Joachim also presented her to the high priest, who blessed her saying ‘God of infinite majesty, look down upon this little child and grant her a blessing, supreme and beyond compare.’

³² Then her mother carried Mary into the holy place kept for her and gave her the breast, singing to the lord this hymn, ‘I will sing to the Lord my God, for He has visited me and taken away the reproach of my enemies. ³³ For the Lord has given me the fruit of His righteousness, at once simple and multiple in its operation. ³⁴ Who will now tell it to the sons of Reuben that Anna is a mother? ³⁵ Learn, learn you twelve tribes of Israel, that Anna is a mother!’ ³⁶ Then she left the child in the holy place reserved for her, and went out to serve the guests, who rejoiced and praised the God of Israel.

Synaxarion 9 September **Synaxis of the Righteous Ancestors of God Joachim and Anna**

¹ It is as mediators of our Salvation through the Mother of God who was born of them, that we honor the righteous Joachim and Anna on this day, not (as is customary in the feasts of Saints) the memory of their departure from this life.

Synaxarion 21 November **Commemoration of the Entry into the Temple of our Sovereign Lady the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary**

¹ When the holy and most pure child whom God granted to mankind (long barren because of sin, passions and death) had reached the age of two years, her father Joachim said to his wife: *Let us take her to the Temple of the Lord in order to keep the promise that we made to consecrate her to the Almighty from her earliest years.* ² But Anna replied: *Let*

us wait until she is three years old; perhaps she will call for her father and mother and will not stay in the Temple of the Lord.

³When she was three, her parents decided to fulfill their vow and to present their child at the Temple. ⁴Joachim summoned daughters of Hebrews of pure lineage to attend on her and to go before her into the Temple carrying flaming torches, so that the child, attracted by their light, might not be tempted to turn back towards her parents. ⁵But the Holy Virgin, born all pure and raised by God from her birth to a height of virtue and of love for the things of Heavens above every other creature, ran forward towards the temple. ⁶Overtaking her attendant maidens and with never a glance back at the world, she threw herself into the arms of the High Priest Zacharias, who was waiting for her at the gate of the Temple with the Elders. ⁷Zacharias blessed her saying: *The Lord has glorified thy name in every generation.* ⁸*It is in thee that he will reveal the Redemption that he has prepared for his people in the last days.* ⁹Then he brought the Child into the Holy of Holiest – which was an unheard-of thing under the Old Covenant for only the High Priest was allowed to enter there once a year on the Day of Atonement. ¹⁰He sat her down on the third step of the altar whereupon the Lord caused his Grace to descend upon her. ¹¹She arose and expressed her joy in a dance. ¹²Wonder seized all who contemplated this sight that bespoke the marvels God would soon accomplish in her.

¹³Having in this manner abandoned the world, her parents and all connexion with things of the senses, the Holy Virgin dwelt in the temple for the next nine years until, reaching marriageable age, she was taken from the sanctuary by the priests and elders, who feared lest the custom of women come upon her there. ¹⁴They entrusted her to the chaste Joseph as the guardian of her virginity, through to all appearances her Betrothed.

¹⁵Our Most Holy Lady dwelt like a dove in the sanctuary, sustained by spiritual food brought by an angel of God, until she was twelve years old. ¹⁶She led a heavenly life, above that of our first parents in paradise. ¹⁷Without care and without passion, having passed beyond the necessities of nature and the tyranny of the pleasure of the senses, she lived for God alone, her intellect fixed at every moment on the contemplation of His beauty. ¹⁸During her sojourn in the Temple, the holy child, through continuous prayer and vigilance, accomplished the purification of her heart, to make of it a pure mirror to reflect the glory of God. ¹⁹She adorned herself as a bride in the splendid raiment of the virtues in readiness for the advent within herself of Christ the divine Bridegroom. ²⁰She attained such perfection as to become the sum of all the holiness in the world and, when she had become like unto God by virtue, she drew God to make Himself like unto man by His Incarnation.

²¹From the depths of the unapproachable sanctuary, which she had entered at an age when other children begin to learn, our Most Holy Lady listened each Sabbath day as the Law and the Prophets were read to the people assembled in the courts of the Temple.

²²With her intellect refined by solitude and prayer, she was able to comprehend the depth of the mysteries of Scripture. ²³Living among the holy things and in contemplating her own purity, she understood what the propose of God had been throughout the history of His chosen people. ²⁴She understood that all of that time was necessary in order that God might prepare for Himself a mother from out of rebellious humanity, and that she, pure child chosen by God, must become the true living Temple of the Godhead. ²⁵Having her station in the Holy of Holies where the tokens of the divine promise were placed, the Virgin reveled that these figures were to be fulfilled in her person. ²⁶The obscure prophecies become clear in her – the Sanctuary, the Tabernacle of the Word of God, the Ark of the

New Covenant, the Vase containing the heavenly manna, Aaron's rod that budded, the Table of the Law of Grace. ²⁷She is the Ladder joining heaven and earth which the Patriarch Jacob saw in a dream; she is the Pillar of cloud that reveals the glory of God; the cloud of dew of the Prophet Isaiah; the uncut Mountain of Daniel; the shut Gate that Ezekiel spoke of sealed, from which the waters of everlasting Life pour forth upon us.

²⁸Contemplating in her spirit these marvels that should take place in her, but still without understanding clearly how they were going to happen, our Most Holy Lady directed her prayer towards the Lord with yet more intensity, begging him not to tarry in fulfilling his promises but to save the human race from death by coming to dwell among men.

²⁹When the Mother of God entered into the Holy of Holies, the time of preparation and testing of the Old Covenant came to an end and today we keep the feast of the betrothal of God to human nature. ³⁰Wherefore the Church rejoices and exhorts all the friends of God for their part to enter into the temple of their heart, there to make ready for the coming of the Lord by silence and prayer, withdrawing from the pleasures and cares of the world.

Synaxarion 9 December **The Conception by Saint Anna of the Most Holy Mother of God**

¹In accordance with the eternal purpose of God, who willed to prepare a most pure habitation for Himself in order to take flesh and dwell among men, Joachim and Anna were prevented from having children for many years. ²Their barren old age was symbolic of human nature itself, bowed down and dried up under the weight of sin and death, yet they never ceased begging God to take away their reproach. ³Now when the time of preparation determined by the Lord had been fulfilled, God sent an Angel to Joachim in solitude on a mountain, and to Anna in her affliction weeping in her garden, to tell them that the ancient prophecies were soon to be fulfilled in them: a child would be born to them, who was destined to become the veritable Ark of the new Covenant, the divine Ladder, the unburnt Bush, the uncut Mountain, the living Temple where the Word of God would take up his abode. ⁴Through the conception of Anna, the bareness of human nature itself, separated from God by death, has on this day been brought to an end; and by the wondrous birth-giving of her who had remained childless until the age when women can no longer bear fruit, God announced and testified to the more astonishing miracle of the Conception without seed, and of the immaculate coming to birth of Christ within the heart and the womb of the Most Holy Virgin and Mother of God.

⁵Even through the birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary took place through a miraculous action of God, she was conceived by the union of man and woman in accordance with the laws of our human nature, which has fallen through Adam's transgression and become subject to sin and corruption (cf. Gen. 3:16). ⁶As the chosen Vessel and precious Shrine prepared by God since the beginning of time, she is indeed the most pure and the most perfect of humankind, but even so, she has not been set apart from our common inheritance nor from the consequences of the sin of our first parents. ⁷Just as it was fitting that Christ, in order to deliver us from death by his own voluntary death (Heb.2:14), should by His Incarnation be made like to men in all things except sin: so it was meet that His Mother, in whose womb the Word of God would unite with human nature, should be subject to death and corruption like every child of Adam, lest we be not fully included in Salvation and

Redemption. ⁸The Mother of God has been chosen and preferred among all women, not arbitrary, but because God foresaw that she would preserve her purity and keep it perfect: conceived and born like all of us, she was worthy to become the Mother of the Son of God and the Mother of us all. ⁹So, in her tenderness and compassion, she is able to intercede for us with her Son, that He may have mercy upon us.

¹⁰Just as the Lord Jesus Christ was the fruit of the virginity of the holy Mother of God, so she herself was the fruit of the chastity of Joachim and Anna. ¹¹And by following the same path of chastity we too, monks and Christian married people, can bring Christ to be born and grow in us.

S 25 December **The Nativity according to the Flesh of Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ**

¹Cesar Augustus, the first Roman Emperor (30BC-AD14), having made all the peoples of the known world subject to his sole authority, decided, in the height of his power, to take a census of the vast population of the Empire, and he thereby became the unwitting instrument of the realization of God's plan. ²For in bringing together and establishing peace and harmony among the many peoples of the immense Empire, with their diverse customs and languages, he prepared them for the revelation of the One God in three Persons, and thus opened the way for the universal proclamation of the Gospel, in accordance with the divine promise: I shall give thee the nations for thine inheritance (Ps. 2:8). Thus this first census prophetically foretold the enrolment of the elect in the Book of Life (cf. Phil. 4:3; Rev. 21:27).

³The imperial decree reached Palestine when Quirinius was governor of Syria, and occasioned the fulfillment of the prophecy that the Messiah should be born in the lineage of Judah at Bethlehem, the native city of king David (Mic. 5:2). ⁴For Joseph, who was then with Mary at Nazareth in Galilee, had to be enrolled at Bethlehem, the town of his forefathers, even though the pregnancy was well advanced of her whom all took to be his wife.

⁵On their arrival they found the place crowded with people from all over the country, who like themselves had come for the census. ⁶Unable to find lodging at the inn, they had to shelter for the night outside the town in a cave that was used as a cattle shed. ⁷Since Mary felt that the time had come for her to be delivered of her child, Joseph settled her as best he could in the straw, close by the ox and ass which they found there, and he went out in haste to look for a midwife. ⁸On Joseph's way, he noticed that the whole of nature had suddenly become utterly still as though seized with astonishment: the birds hung motionless in midair, men and beasts stopped in their tracks, and the waters ceased flowing. ⁹The continuous movement that leads everything from birth to death and imprisons it in vanity was suspended, for at the moment the Eternal entered within the heart of time. ¹⁰The pre-eternal God became a newborn child. Time and history now took on a new dimension.

¹¹The universal hush did not last, and everything appeared to resume its normal course. Joseph found a midwife who was coming down the mountain. ¹²He told her, on the way to the cave, of her who was about to give birth. ¹³But on reaching the cave they were

prevented from entering by a thick cloud which covered it like that on Mount Sinai when God revealed Himself to Moses (Exod.19:16). ¹⁴The woman fell to the ground and cried out: ‘My soul has been magnified this day, for my eyes have seen a wonder: a Savior has been born in Israel’ the cloud lifted and gave place to a dazzling light which, decreasing little by little, allowed them entrance at last. ¹⁵They were in excess of mind to behold the All Holy Lady sitting beside the manger where she had placed the child which she had wrapped in swaddling clothes. ¹⁶Joseph already knew from the Angel that the Blessed Virgin had conceived the Savior by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and as he contemplated the little Child lying in the straw, he silently adored the Messiah, awaited and foretold by his fathers for so many generations. Indeed what could be more amazing than this sight, and how could words express it?

¹⁷The Almighty God and Creator of all things became a lowly weak creature, a little homeless sojourner, yet without ceasing to be divine and uncircumscribed. ¹⁸The Word of God took place upon Himself the heaviness of flesh and, clothing Himself in or humanity made of it a royal robe. ¹⁹He who is seated in impassibility upon His heavenly throne, attended by myriads of the heavenly host who glorify Him without cease, accepted to be contained in an obscure, narrow cave, rejected and despised by all. ²⁰He who is of divine nature humbled himself, *emptied himself, taking the form of a servant and being born in the likeness of men.* (Phil.2:7). ²¹He who cannot be touched accepted to be wrapped in swaddling bands in order to release us from sins and to cover with divine glory those who were disgraced. ²²God’s only Son, He who is in the bosom of the father from all eternity, became Son of man and son of the Virgin without ceasing to be God, in order to become the *first-born among many brethren* (Rom.8:29), so granting to men the dignity of adoptive sons of God (John 12:12; Luke 6:35; Gal. 4:4-7). He is laid in a crib and gazed upon by the ox and the ass, whereby the prophecies are fulfilled: *In the midst of two animals thou shalt be known* (Hab 3:2 LXX) and, *The ox knows his Creator and the ass his Master’s crib* (Is. 1:3 LXX). ²³He who gives food to all flesh by His providence is laid in the manger of these animals without reason, which symbolize the Jews and the Gentile, in order to heal mankind of its madness, and to reconcile those whom hatred had kept apart (Eph. 2:16) by offering himself for the sustenance of all as the true *Bread of life* (John 6:51). ²⁴Moreover, in this scene, say the holy Fathers, an image of the Church is presented to our contemplation: the crib represents the chalice containing Him who became flesh on this day and gives Himself as food *for the life of the world*: the Virgin is at once His throne and the altar of sacrifice; the cave a temple; the Angels, Joseph and the shepherds serve as deacons and acolytes; and the Lord Himself ministers as High Priest in this divine Liturgy.

²⁵A countrywoman called Salome who chanced to pass that way learned from the midwife of the wonder that had taken place, but she did not show the same faith. ²⁶She thought it past belief that a virgin should give birth and, not only that, but remain a virgin after bringing forth her child. ²⁷With an incredulity rather like that of the Apostle Thomas (John 20:25), she dared to extend a shameless hand to the body of the All Holy Virgin. ²⁸Her hand was immediately struck as if with palsy and she cried out: ‘Woe is me for my impiety and unbelief! I have provoked the living God! Look, my hand has been shriveled up as though by fire and is dropping off!’ ²⁹Falling to her knees, she implored the Lord to take pity on her, at which an angel appeared and allowed her to take the Divine Infant in her arms. ³⁰With sincere faith full of the fear of God, she exclaimed: ‘I bow down before Him, for a great King has been born in Israel!’ ³¹She was healed immediately, but the

Angel counseled her to keep all these wonders to herself until the Lord should make Himself known in Israel.

The same day (25 December), Memory of the Shepherds, who Saw the Lord

³²Not far from the cave where this astonishing wonder took place, some poor shepherds were guarding their flock on the edge of the Judean wilderness. ³³They were taking it in turn to keep watch by night, when all at once an Angel appeared, and the glory of God covered them with dazzling brightness. ³⁴They were very frightened, but the Angel reassured them, telling them that the babe whom they would see lying in the crib was the Messiah, the Good Shepherd who had come to gather his scattered flock, and the Lord of glory had come on earth to look for the lost sheep. ³⁵Having told them the sign by which they would recognize the child, the Angel was joined by a great company of the heavenly host singing the praises of God, and calling upon the ranks of Angels and the men to exult: ‘Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.’ ³⁶In unison with the Angels the whole creation resounds today with a single song of gladness and, in the Name of Jesus, all in highest heaven (namely the Angels), on earth, and under the earth bow down in adoration, and *every tongue proclaims that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father* (Phil.2:10-11).

³⁷After the departure of the Angels, the shepherds set out at once for the stable, taking with them the humble presents which they would offer with all their heart to the Lord. ³⁸On their way back, they made known to everyone whom they met the wonders which, as forerunners of the Apostles, they had just witnessed.

Memory of the Veneration of the Magi

³⁹At that time, three Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem with a magnificent escort, asking after the newborn King, whom they had come to venerate. ⁴⁰Priests and seers from among the pagan worshippers of the sun and the other stars, but nonetheless upright and endowed with wisdom, they investigated the heavenly bodies, not in order to predict the future but to trace the ways of divine Providence; and they studied the secrets of nature in order to come to knowledge of the Truth. ⁴¹Full of these good intentions, they had observed the sudden appearance in the firmament of a star which, drawing near the earth, shone with so brilliant a light as to be clearly visible even at midday, and which at night outshone every other star.

⁴²From their knowledge of the sayings of the ancient Prophets, the Magi recalled the Prophecy about Israel pronounced long before by Ballam, the seer who came from Mesopotamia at the request of Balak, the King of Moab: *I see him but not now, I glorify him, but not nigh; a Star shall come forth out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel* (Num. 24:17). ⁴³They deduced that the King who would subdue the nations, the Messiah awaited by Israel, had appeared, and they made ready for the long journey. ⁴⁴Being the *first-fruits of the Gentiles* and prefiguring the conversion of the peoples far removed from

the revelation to Israel, they set out to bring Him worship in advance of the stony-hearted Jews, and as they went, the star going before showed them the way.

⁴⁵Strange though it may seem, this luminary was no inanimate light, but one of the angelic powers of heaven which took the form of a star, to conform to the understanding of the Magi, who were accustomed to study the stars for clues to the attainment of knowledge of God. ⁴⁶Unlike the planets that appear to move from East to West this star, which was brighter than the sun, went before them from Persia in the North, southward to Jerusalem, and then disappeared for a while, before leading them to Bethlehem and stationing itself over the place where the Child lay (Matt.2:9). ⁴⁷It showed the way to the Magi, as the pillar of fire had shown the way to the people of Israel in the wilderness (Ex. 13:21); and it came down so close to the ground that the cave where the Savior lay was indicated clearly in its light. ⁴⁸These extraordinary happenings, which astrology could not account for, had the effect of driving doubt from the spirit of the Magi and of causing them to lay aside all mistrust so that, even while they were on their way, they gave up the worship of the stars for the adoration of the *Sun of righteousness*, Who has come into the world to shed upon mankind the light of true knowledge of God.

⁴⁹When they reached Jerusalem the star disappeared from their sight. ⁵⁰Not knowing where to go, but believing that the Jews would be eager to recognize their King from on High, they made their way to the place of Herod, the King of Judea, a cruel and depraved man who never hesitated to rid himself of anyone who might be threat to his power. ⁵¹On learning from the magi why they had come, he immediately gathered the scribes and doctors of the Law to find out who the King announced by the Prophets might be. ⁵²The Elders assured him that the Messiah, the Liberator of Israel, was indeed expected at Bethlehem, the native town of King David. ⁵³Then having called the Magi to a private audience, Herod directed them to Bethlehem and asked them to let him know of their return where the newborn King was to be found: *'so that I too may come and do him homage,'* as he alleged (Matt,2:8), while really intending to do Him to death.

⁵⁴As soon as they left Jerusalem, the star appeared once again to the magi and led them to the humble cave. ⁵⁵Entering therein full of joy and holy fear as into the palace of a greatest of Kings, these rich noble travelers from afar cast themselves to the ground before the Child enthroned in the manger, and opening the treasures of their hearts, they adored him and offered him rare and precious gifts: gold to honor him as King, incense as befitting God, and myrrh – the aromatic oil used in the burial of the dead – for the Immortal One who was soon to suffer death for our Salvation. ⁵⁶Then warned in a dream of Herod's plan, they returned to their own country by another road, thereby teaching those who have once drawn near to Christ not to return to evil ways.

Synaxarion 26 December **The Synaxis of our Sovereign Lady the All Holy Mother of God**

¹Yesterday (25 December), together with the Angels, the Magi and the shepherds, we offered our worship to God made man, and born a little child for our Salvation; and today (26 December) we pay homage to His Mother, the Holy Virgin Mary. ²The Church sets her before us in the cave beside her Son as the *new Eve*, the first and pre-eminent

representative of the renewed human race. Chose and prepared by God throughout all generation, for the fulfilment of the *Great Mystery* of His Incarnation.

³It has pleased God to appear among men in a manner beyond the grasp of our understanding. ⁴The Only Son of God, born from all eternity of the Father without forthgoing or division, is conceived in the womb of the Virgin without participation of a man, through the working of the Holy Spirit, and He submits voluntarily to the ordinances of the Law touching birth and growth, at the same time as renewing them. ⁵Without going forth from His nature, but still abiding in the bosom of the Father, He takes human nature upon Himself and becomes the only son of the Virgin, waving in her womb the purple robe of His body. ⁶There are two births, the one divine and eternal, the other human and subject to time; but one only Son, the Word of God made man. ⁷One only Person was born of her, the God-man (*Theanthropos*) – without mother as regards His divine nature and without father as regards his human nature. The properties of the divine nature and human nature – hitherto separated by an impassable gulf – are so closely conjoined in Him that they interchange without confusing in an ineffable manner. ⁸Just as iron plunged into fire imparts its solidity to the fire at the same time as the heat and light of the fire pass into the iron, likewise here, the Deity voluntarily submits to the weakness of the flesh, and humanity is clothed with glory of God, so that we can extol our Most Holy Lady as, in very truth, MOTHER OF GOD (*Theotokos*). ⁹The little child lying in the crib is in fact not a simple man foreordained to receive divine grace as a reward for his virtues, not just one God's elect like the Saints and the Prophets or even a Godbearing man; but He is truly the Word, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, who assumed human nature that He might in Himself renew and recreate humanity by restoring within it the image of God that sin has tarnished and deformed.

¹⁰The Mother of God has become more glorious than the Cherubim and the Seraphim and all heavenly host, for she is the spiritual Paradise of the Second Adam, the Temple of the Godhead, the Bridge that links earth to Heaven, the Ladder by which God has come down to earth and by which man has ascended to Heaven; and in sheltering Christ her womb has become the throne of God and her bosom has been made *broader than the heavens*. ¹¹Thanks to her, man is raised higher than the Angels and the glory of the Deity shines in his body. In face of such a mystery the human spirit, grown dizzy, would rather bow down in silence and faith, for *where God wills, the order of human nature is overcome*. ¹²Like Joseph the Silent, illumined by the unwonted light shining in the darkness of the cave, our spirit contemplates the All Holy Lady seated peacefully and radiant beside the Child whom she herself has wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the crib. ¹³There was no trace in her of the pains of childbirth nor of the consequent exhaustion felt by other women; for, as was fitting, virgin of soul and body, she did not conceive in pleasure and so she gave birth without pain. ¹⁴Virgin before conception, virgin in giving birth and ever-virgin after Saviour's birth, she thus makes known to women the joy of deliverance from the curse pronounced on Eve, the first mother, on the day of the transgression (Gen.:3:16).

¹⁵A new way of living has been opened to human nature; for just as God has chosen virginity in order to be born corporeally into this world, likewise it is through virginity that He wishes to appear and to grow spiritually in the soul of every Christian who orders his life after the example given by the Mother of God.

Synaxarion 26 December **The flight into Egypt of the Mother of God**

¹⁶After the departure of the Magi, an Angel appeared once again to Saint Joseph. ¹⁷He made known to him that King Herod was soon going to send soldiers into the district to look for the Child to kill Him, and he urged him to flee (Matt. 2:13) without more ado, Joseph gathered up their few belongings, and placed Mary and the Child on a donkey; then the Holy Family set off by night on the long, wearying road to Egypt, the time-honoured refuge of persecuted Jews.

¹⁸Neither Herod's soldiers nor any worldly power could hold any dread for the Saviour in his divinity; but having, by His Incarnation, taken upon Himself our human nature in all its weakness and vulnerability, it was His will to keep his sovereign power hidden and withdrawn, and He refused to work miracles until the beginning of his public ministry on the day of His Baptism by John. ¹⁹The Maker of heaven and earth, who is ministered to by the angelic hosts, flees danger today, clasped in the arms of the Blessed Virgin, enduring the heat and weariness of the road, the very image of the humility and renunciation, in order to make plain to all that He has become man in truth, and not by illusion as some heretics suppose. ²⁰Thus from the beginning of His earthly life, Christ deigns not only to suffer hunger and thirst, cold and all the other ills our flesh is heir to, but he also experiences persecution and exile, in order that His future disciples may, from his example, learn to encounter with joy the tribulation they will meet with in their turn.

²¹Moreover the land of Egypt, mother of every superstition and idolatrous cult, symbol of the passion and sin, and country of Pharaoh who imaged the Devil, was the Lord's chosen place of refuge in order to fulfil the prophecy: *Out of Egypt I have called my Son* (Hos. 11:1); which announced in a veiled manner that He has come into the world to put an end to idolatry and to bring mankind to knowledge of the Truth.

²²According to legend, on the road which brought the Child to Egypt, unreasoning nature recognized God hidden in human form, and worshipped Him whom mankind, blinded by passions, could not see. ²³It is said that the Holy Family was escorted by lions who, lamblike, frisked around and played with the beasts of burden and domestic animals that they had with them, in order to fulfil the prophesy of Isaiah: *The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox* (62:25). ²⁴One day the Divine Child commanded a date palm to bend to the ground in order to offer its fruit to the Mother of God; when at Jesus' word it had stood upright again, a spring of fresh, clear water gushed from its roots to quench their thirst. ²⁵And nature all around them, as though made new, resumed the state of earthly Paradise. ²⁶On reaching a town called Satin in the region of

Hermopolis, Jesus and his parents went into a huge temple where there was an idol for every day of the year. ²⁷All of them fell to the ground and were dashed to pieces when the Virgin appeared, carrying in her arms God, the Way, the Truth and the Life, in fulfilment of the prophecy: *Behold the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them* (Is.19:1).

²⁸With the removal of danger upon Herod's death several months after their arrival in Egypt, an Angel of God again appeared to Joseph and instructed him to return to Palestine (Matt.2:19). ²⁹Rather than stay in Bethlehem, too close to Jerusalem, where Herod's ruthless and tyrannical son Archelaüs was in power, Joseph was told to make his way to Galilee, and settled in the small town of Nazareth. ³⁰Thus was fulfilled another word of the Prophets: He shall be called a Nazarene (Matt. 2:23).

S 26 December Saint Joseph the Betrothed

³¹The holy and righteous Joseph, witness and servant of the great mystery of the Incarnation, came of the royal tribe of Judah and of the house of David. ³²The son of Jacob (Matt.1:16), and son-in-law of Heli, he was by trade a carpenter in Nazareth, and he had seven children by his first marriage: four sons; James, Joses, Jude and Simon (or Symeon), and three daughters; Esther, Martha and Salome, the wife of Zebedee and mother of the Apostle James and John. ³³When in the middle age he became a widower, he was chosen by the high priest, on a sign from God, to become the protector and guardian of the virginity of Our Lady on her leaving the Temple, where she had dwelt until her twelfth year; and so he appeared in the eyes of everyone to be her lawful husband.

³⁴But during the days of their betrothal, the holy Virgin conceived by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and on her return to Nazareth, after spending three months with Elizabeth, the first signs of maternity appeared in her, to the bewilderment and distress of the pious and righteous Joseph, who could not comprehend how the Virgin consecrated to the Lord could be guilty of secret relations. ³⁵Strict morality required that he divorce her, but being a just and compassionate man he did not want to put the young girl to shame publicly; and so, having resorted to prayer, he decided to send her away quietly. ³⁶But an Angel of the Lord then appeared to him in a dream and reassured him, telling him that this conception was the work of the Holy Spirit and that he was to become the foster father of the Child, whom he should look after and bring up. ³⁷The righteous Joseph took Mary to his home and their marriage was celebrated; but he kept secret and adored in silence the great mystery to which he had been initiated, until they had to leave for the registration at Bethlehem. Joseph was one of the first witnesses of the all-surpassing marvel of the birth of God incarnate, and his was the privilege of giving the Child His name: JESUS. ³⁸After the visit of the shepherds and of the Magi, the Nagel of the Lord again come to him as he slept, and told him to flee immediately with the Child and His Mother to Egypt, in order to escape Herod's murderous plans. ³⁹On their return to Nazareth when the danger had passed, Joseph took up his trade again, teaching it and all his knowledge of the precepts of

the Law to Jesus, the All-Creating Word and Lawgiver, who made Himself weak and unlearned in order to lift us up to true knowledge.

⁴⁰The years of Our Savior's childhood passed in humility, peace, recollection, daily work and obedience to his earthly parents, under the protection of Joseph, the silent guardian of the mysteries, and of the Mother of God, who kept all the wonders of the Incarnation of God in her heart and meditated on them for us.

⁴¹When the time for the Lord Jesus to begin his ministry drew near, Joseph gave back his soul to God in the presence of Jesus and of Mary, having fulfilled with humility and devotion all that he was sent to do. ⁴²According to legend, he died with these words on his lips: *The pains and the fears of death encompass me; but my soul has become calm again since I have heard Thy voice, Jesus my defender, Jesus my savior, Jesus my refuge, Jesus whose Name is sweet in my mouth and to the heart of all who love Thee.*

Synaxarion 25 March **The annunciation of our Most Holy Lady and Ever-Virgin Mary**

¹On this day that follows hard on the Spring Equinox, when the darkness of night, having reached its furthest extent, begins to yield its place to the light the Church celebrates the conception of our Lord Jesus Christ and the descent into this shadow-shrouded world of the Sun of Righteousness. ²He, reversing the movement of time and history, turned a descent towards death into an ascent towards the unchanging springtime of eternity.

³The root and principle of all the other feasts of the Lord, by which, each year, we commemorate our Redemption, the Feast of the Annunciation must always be celebrated strictly on this same date because, according to an ancient Tradition, it was in the month of March that the world was created by God, and it was on precisely 25 March that Adam, beguiled by serpent, transgressed the divine command and was driven out of Paradise. ⁴It was therefore fitting that the healing of our nature be accomplished, like a second creation, by the same means and on the same days as those of our Fall. ⁵And, as mankind was subject to death by Eve's disobedience in the springtime of the world, it was fitting that mankind be delivered in the month of March by the obedience of the Virgin.

⁶Magnificently developing this doctrine of connections in the economy of Redemption, Saint Irenaeus of Lyons writes on the subject: 'As the former (Eve) had been seduced by the discourse of an angel, so that she fell away from God through transgressing the Angel's word, so the latter (Mary) was taught the Good News by the discourse of an angel, so that she bore God in obedience to the Angel's word. ⁷Even as the former was seduced so that she disobeyed God, even so the latter let herself be persuaded to obey God, so that the Virgin Mary becomes the advocate for the virgin Eve. ⁸The human race having been made subject to death by a virgin it was freed by a virgin, the disobedience of the one virgin being counterbalanced by the obedience of the other.'

⁹After the Fall, God, exercising long-suffering in His infinite mercy, had little by little prepared humanity, from generation to generation, through joyful and sorrowful events, for the realization of the Great Mystery that He had kept hidden before all ages in His Trinitarian Counsels: the Incarnation of the Word. ¹⁰Although He knew long beforehand what would be man's transgression and its tragic consequences, it was with the fulfillment of this Mystery in view that He created humankind in order therein 'to prepare a Mother', who, by the beauty of her immaculate soul, enhanced by the adornment of all the

virtues, drew on herself the gaze of the Almighty and become the nuptial chamber of the Word, the receptacle of Him who contains all things, the Palace of the King of Heaven and the fulfilling of the divine plan.

¹¹Six month after the miraculous conception of him who was in all things to be the Forerunner of the Lord (Luke 1:17), Gabriel, the Angel of Divine Mercy, was sent by God to Nazareth in Galilee, to the Virgin Mary, who had, on leaving the Temple, been betrothed to Joseph, a righteous and chaste man, for him to guard her virginity.¹² Appearing suddenly in the house in human form, with a rod in his hand, the Angel greeted her who was to become, the consolation of Eve's tears', saying: *Rejoice, thou that are highly favored; the Lord is with thee* (Luke 1:28).¹³ Before this strange apparition, the Virgin let fall her distaff and, deeply troubled by the words from this incorporeal being, asked herself if this proclamation of joy was not, as it had been for Eve, a new deception by him who well knew how *to transform himself into an angel of light* (II Cor. 11:14).¹⁴ But the Angel reassured her, and said to her: *Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God.*¹⁵ Do not wonder at my strange appearance or at these joyful words, although your nature, tricked in days of old by the serpent, has been condemned to you, and deliverance from the curse of our first mother (Gen. 3:16).¹⁶ *Behold, thou shalt conceive and bear a son. And, thou shalt call His name Jesus* (which means Savior). *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest.*

¹⁷On hearing these strange words, the Virgin exclaimed: *How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?*¹⁸ She did not doubt the divine word through lack of faith like Zacharias, who was punished for this with dumbness (Luke 1:20), but asked herself how this mystery could be brought about in her without the union of wedlock, which had become the law of reproduction of a human race subject to corruption.¹⁹ Understanding her doubts, the Angel laid no blame on her, but explained to her the new manner of this birth: *The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee; on her who was full of grace in preparation for His coming, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.*²⁰ Then, reminding her that Elizabeth, who had been known as 'the barren one', had conceived a son in her old age, he showed her that there *where God so wishes, the order of nature is overcome*, and confirmed that the Holy Spirit, is coming upon her, would accomplish a miracle greater than that, the King of the universe, he who contains all things, would empty Himself through an ineffable condescension, in order to dwell in her womb, to mingle Himself with human nature in a union without confusion and clothe Himself in her flesh, steeped in her virginal blood as in royal purple.

²¹Bending her gaze humbly earthwards, and cleaving with her whole will to the divine plan, the Virgin replied: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.*

²²With these words she gave her assent, and with her the whole of human nature, to the coming within her the divine power conveyed by the Angel's words. It was at the very moment that the conception of the Savior was wrought.²³ The Son of God became the Son of man, one single Person in two natures. God clothed Himself in humanity and the Virgin became in very truth the Mother of God (*Theotokos*), so that, by this exchange of natural qualities, men, delivered from hell, can become sons of God by grace.

²⁴The accomplishing of this mystery of the Incarnation that was hidden even from the angels was not therefore the work only of the Father, in His good pleasure, of the Son who came down from heaven and of the Holy Spirit who covered the Virgin with His

overshadowing. ²⁵The Lord had been waiting for her whom he had chosen before all women, to take an active part by her free and voluntary acquiescence, so that the redemption of the human race would become the common action of the will of God and the faith of man. ²⁶This came to pass by a free co-operation (*synergia*) of humanity with the divine plan, that brought about the Great Mystery which had been prepared from the foundation of the world: *God became man that man might become God in Him*, and that the Virgin, the *Bride Unwedded*, has become for our restored nature the source and cause of every blessing.

²⁷Perceived of old in ‘types’ by the prophets as the *Bush that burned but was not consumed* (Gen. 3:14), *the unquarried Mountain* (Dan. 2:45) and the *sealed Doorway* through which God alone could pass (Ezek. 44:2), the Mother of God is the *living Ladder* (Gen.28:10-17) by which God has come down and allows men to climb to heaven. ²⁸She has opened a new way of existence to humankind: virginity, through which the body of every man and woman is, as a consequence, called to become the *temple of God* (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

²⁹The whole creation, formerly subjected to corruption by man’s transgression, was also waiting on this ‘Yes’ by the Virgin, which proclaimed the beginning of its deliverance. ³⁰This is why heaven and earth, reunited, from today an exultant choir together with the sons of Adam to glorify God and honor the Conception by His unwedded Mother.

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¹As soon as the Archangel Gabriel had left the most Holy Mother of God, after having announced the Good News of her virginal childbearing and having referred to her cousin Elisabeth’s pregnancy, as a confirmation of his words, Mary went with haste to the village in Judaea where Zachariah and Elizabeth lived. ²She greeted her cousin, and immediately the six-month fetus in Elizabeth’s womb leapt for joy, making himself the Savior’s Forerunner even before his birth. Elizabeth cried aloud: ‘Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb! ³And whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? (Luke 1:39-44). ⁴Mary replied with her wondrous canticle of thanksgiving: My soul doth magnify the Lord. ⁵She remained with Elizabeth for three months, giving her practical help and talking with her about God’s wonderful acts; then she returned home.

11. APPENDIX 3: THE PROTOGOSPEL OF JAMES FROM THE MISC. 377/595

The Greek Manuscript of the *Protogospel of James* from the Library of the Romanian Academy

In my research in Romania, I discovered a Greek manuscript of the *Protogospel of James*, written in the thirteen century, which, as far as I know, was never mentioned in any academic works. The manuscript is preserved in the Library of the Romanian Academy, and, since 1909, it has been listed in the Library's Catalog of Greek manuscripts. The *Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes* in Paris has a list of the New Testament Apocrypha written before the sixteen century. On this list is mentioned the Library of the Romanian Academy having in its collection a fourteenth-century manuscript of the *Protogospel of James*. The manuscript is dated in the thirteenth century in the *Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts of the Library of Romanian Academy*, whereas at the *Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes* it is dated in the fourteenth century.⁵⁷⁸ I asked at the Institute about this discrepancy. They advised me that all the dates have to be used with caution. The information about the copyists and the dating of the manuscripts was started only in 2000, and errors will eventually be corrected. Information they have on the Greek apocrypha of the New Testament, written before the sixteenth century, are extracted from the third edition of the *Répertoire des bibliothèques et des catalogues de manuscrits grecs de Marcel Richard*, by Jean-Marie Olivier (Brepols, Turnhout: 1995). Olivier obtained the information about the *Protogospel of James* (in the Library of the Romanian Academy) from the *Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts of the Library of Romanian Academy*, edited

⁵⁷⁸ Constantin Litzica, *Catalogul Manuscriselor Grecesti (The Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts)*, Bucharest, Romania: Editiunea Academiei Romane, 1909, p. 275; and Pinakes: Textes et manuscrits grecs, Institute de recherche et d'histoire des texts: http://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/rech_oeuvre/resultOeuvre/filter_auteur/5553/filter_oeuvre/711 (accessed on september 2009)

in 1909 by Constantin Litzica. Thus, I will use Litzica's catalogue for the information regarding the *Protogospel of James* because it is the primary source for all later databases.

Litzica states that this manuscript of the *Protogospel of James* was written in the thirteenth century and belongs to a miscellaneous book coded with two numbers: 595 and 377 (Misc. 377/595).⁵⁷⁹ Misc. 377/595 received the number 595 in Litzica's catalog, whereas 377 is the oldest bookshelf number it has since the miscellaneous book entered the Library's collection.

Misc. 377/595 belonged to the Museum of Antiquities that received it from Saint Sava College Bucharest before it eventually entered the collection of the Library in the Romanian Academy.⁵⁸⁰ The Saint Sava College is the continuation of the Princely Academy, a higher education institution in Bucharest, Romania. Even today, Saint Sava College is one of the most prestigious colleges in Bucharest.

The Princely Academy was created in 1688 at the initiative of the Walachian stolnic Constantin Cantacuzino (1650-1716). It was initially located in the buildings of Saint Sava Monastery, where a large library existed.⁵⁸¹ Later, in 1864, during the reign of Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the school changed its location to its present site.⁵⁸² The Saint Sava monastery, where the Princely Academy began its activity, was demolished in the last century. Unfortunately, I could not find any traces of the manuscript before 1688. However, the monastic library had many Greek manuscripts that were added to the

⁵⁷⁹ Litzica, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸¹ Alex Drace-Francis, *The making of Modern Romanian Culture; Literacy and the Development of National Identity*, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006, p. 46-54. The history of Saint Sava College is available also on line this address: http://www.licsfsava.ro/download/Pliant_SfSAVA_Engleza.pdf (accessed on 02 Nov. 2009).

⁵⁸² Saint Sava monastery was demolished in the last century, but the Princely Academy, later transformed into Saint Sava College, still exists today in Bucharest.

manuscript collection of the Library of Romanian Academy.⁵⁸³ This Romanian academic library was founded in August 1867, one year after the creation of the Romanian Academy. Today, it still has as its major goal the collection and preservation of the national patrimony, mainly manuscripts and printed materials related primarily to the history and culture of the Romanian people. The old Greek manuscripts belong to the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the library. The collection of the department came mainly from the Library of Saint Sava Monastery, the Library of the Metropolitan Church of Bucharest, and a private collection belonging to the Mavrocordat family.⁵⁸⁴

In summer 2008, during my research trip in Romania, I found the manuscript of the *Protogospel of James* in the Library of the Romanian Academy.⁵⁸⁵ I compared the manuscript with the 140 manuscripts listed by Daniels in his book *The Greek manuscript tradition of the Protoevangelium Jacobi* and with those used by Strycker in his book, *La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques*. The manuscript of the *Protogospel* from the Misc. 377/595 is similar to those mentioned above without being identical to any of them.

In Litzica's description, the Misc. 377/595 consists of 264 stitched pages having the dimensions of 33x23cm, written in two columns by an unknown scribe. The *Protogospel of*

⁵⁸³ In the *Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts* are listed many manuscripts which were initially the property of the Saint Sava's library.

⁵⁸⁴ Mavrocordat is a Fanariot family coming from the Greek island of Kios and related to Romanian boyars, and played a major political and cultural role during the seventeen and eighteen centuries.

The information on the library's collections can be found on the following sites:

<http://www.biblacad.ro/ColectiiSpecialeEng.html> and

http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/21130/11388907381Roumania_-_Scriptorium_Craft.doc/Roumania%2B-%2BScriptorium%2BCraft.doc (accessed on 10 Oct. 2009).

⁵⁸⁵ Gabriela Dumitrescu, director of the Manuscripts department of the Library of Romanian Academy graciously gave me access to the manuscript.

James is placed between pages 96-112. The books with their titles included in the Misc. 377/595 are as follows:⁵⁸⁶

1. Pages 1-25. The beginning (with God) and the birth of our all-holy and wonderful Lady the Theotokos and ever-Virgin Mary.
2. Pages 25-40. Sermon on the birth of our all-holy Lady the Theotokos, by our Holy Father, the Presbyter John Damascene.
3. Pages 40-59. Second sermon on the birth of our all-holy Lady the Theotokos, with the proof that she descends from the tribe of David.
4. Pages 59-73. Third sermon on the birth of our pure Lady the Theotokos and ever-Virgin Mary, by the Holy Father John Damascene.
5. Pages 73-87. Sermon on the birth of the all-holy Theotokos, by our Holy Father Photius, the Archbishop of Constantinople.
6. Pages 87-96. Sermon on how the everlasting Virgin Theotokos rose from a barren womb for the salvation of the mankind, by King Leon.
7. Pages 96-112. The history of the birth of our all-holy Lady the Theotokos and ever-Virgin Mary, by James, the archbishop of Jerusalem.
8. Pages 112-120. Praise to the all-holy Theotokos, by our Holy Father Proklos, the Archbishop of Constantinople.
9. Pages 120-157. Historical speech of Alexander the monk towards several pious fathers about the finding of the precious and life-bearing Cross.
10. Pages 157-175. The martyrdom of the Holy and Great-Martyr George.

⁵⁸⁶ For the content of the Misc. 377/595, I consulted Litzica's *Catalog of the Greek manuscripts*, p. 275.

11. Pages 175- 212. Sermon on the Great-Martyr George, by His Holiness Gregory (from Cyprus), the Archbishop and Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, the New Rome.
12. Pages 212-264. Praise to our Holy Father Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople, by the Chancellor Theodoros Metokitos. (The end of the discourse is missing.)

The last page is usually the place where is written the name of the scribe and the place where he wrote the book. Since it is missing, we do not know either the place where the Misc. 377/595 was written or the scribe's name.

Due to its early dating (thirteenth century), the Misc. 377/595 was probably not written in one of the Romanian monasteries, but in one of the Athonite monasteries. The majority of the Greek manuscripts listed in Litzica's Catalogue written before the fourteenth century were copied in Athonite monasteries and only later brought to the Romanian Principalities. This could also be the case with the Misc. 377/595. In Litzica's Catalogue are also listed Greek manuscripts copied in Moldavian or Walachian monasteries, but these are dated only from the second half of the fourteenth century to the eighteenth century.

From the thirteenth until the seventeenth-century, both Moldavia and Walachia had close relationships with Mount Athos, since many princes were the economic supporters of Athonite churches.⁵⁸⁷ Not only did the princes economically support Mount Athos, but Moldavian and Walachian monasticism also had its Greek influence through the teachings of the Hesychasm brought to the Romanian Principalities by the Athonite monk

⁵⁸⁷ Petru Nasturel, in his book: *Le Mont Athos et les Roumains : recherches sur leurs relations du Milieu du XIVe siècle à 1654*, Roma: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1986, examines the documents which prove that the Athonite monasteries were financial supported by the Moldavian and Walachian princes.

Nikodemus, who was originally from Serbia. In 1369, he went to Walachia and founded two monasteries: Vodita and Tismana. Some of his disciples went to Moldavia and founded the old Neamtu monastery.⁵⁸⁸ One version of the tradition says that the monks were Nicodemus' disciples, whereas another version says that they came to Moldavia directly from Mount Athos and established the first Moldavian monastery. Furthermore, the tradition relates that they brought with them Greek manuscripts from Mount Athos. It is true that the establishment owns the largest monastic library in Romania – eighteen thousand volumes – and many valuable manuscripts, of which two hundred are in Slavonic, over eighty in Greek, and over a hundred and fifty in Romanian (written in the Cyrillic alphabet), dated from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century. Although I could not find any copies of the *Protogospel of James* at Neamtu library or in other Moldavian monasteries, the iconographer, who depicted the *Life of the Mother of God* in the *gropnita* of the Humor's monastic church, might have known this apocryphon, since the *gropnita* is the only place where this apocryphon, alongside the *Synaxarion*, was depicted in frescoes.

I would like to personally thank Gabriela Dumitrescu, director of the Manuscripts department of the Library of Romanian Academy, for having graciously given me a copy of the manuscript, which is included in this dissertation.

⁵⁸⁸ D. J. Deletant, "Some Aspects of the Byzantine Tradition in the Romanian Principalities," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 59 (1981), p. 3.

μεριμενα πασα δαυ
ρεσις και ατραβιας
θαησις. οτι αυτου
θεμελιας και αυτω
μεροσ τηρ δξδλ και
περσ κωνοσ τη φερεσε
μω και εις του αιωρα

αυλην :

ιστορια και κωνοσ αρ
επισκοπον ιεροσολυμ
εις το γενεθλιον της
πρωτης και αυτη η
μεση του κωνου εις τω
θι τον μεθριαν :

μτασις φοριας τωρ δω
δε και φυλοσ του ιηλ
ηριωσ και εε πλουσι
φοδρα. και περσι
φρικω του θεου τα
δωρα αυτου διπλα
λεγωμ βρε αυτου ετα
το της πριου σιασε
παντι τωρω. και το
της αφεσι οσμευικω
του θεου εειλασ
μεορ ελεοι. ηγγισε δε
η ημερα κυ η μεγαλη
και περσι φερομ οι οι
ιηλ τα δωρα αυτου
και ετι κατεμωσ απομ
αυτου ρου ει με μωμ
ου κεισισι πρωτον ει
σεμεγκαι τα δωρα αυτου.

καδοτη απερε ου κει ποι
ησασεμ του ιηλ και ε
λυπη θηιωσ και ε
εισμεμ. και σκε τωρ
τηρ δωρα και φυλοσ
γνωσσεμ ει γω μεοσ
ου κει ποιησαι απερε
βη τω ιηλ και μενησ
ιωσ και εε του πριου
αβραυε. οτι πεσχα
τωρ ημερωμ εδωκεμ
αυτω ο θεος τον ισρα
ακ. και εμνηθιωσ
και εφοδρα. και ου κει
φαινη τη γωσ και αυτου
αλλε δωκεμ ε αυτον εις
τηρ ερημοσ. και επη
ξεμ αυτου τηρ σκηνω
αυτου. και εμνησρετε
αυτου και ημερασ
και τε αυτου και ταμωκ
τασ. μεγωμ βρε αυτου
ου καταμωσ μεμειωσι
μερωτωμ. ουδε τι ποτωμ
βωσου επισκετε ταμω
κωσ ο θεος. και εταμωσ
ημερωσ και ποσωσ
ημερωσ αυτου αμωσ
δωσ θρημοσ ε θρημει
και δωκοπε τοσ εκο
πτε το χεγωσ. τι ποι
ησοσ. και το μεμ ταμω
ρειδωσ η κο το μεμ ταμω



αὐτὴ κρίθνη δὲ ἠγγισθεῖ
 ἢ ἡμίρακῦ ἢ μεγάλη
Καὶ εἰπερὶ οὐδὴ θῆβαι
 Δίσκῳ αὐτῆς· βωσπο
 τιταπῆμοῖς τῆρ τυχῶ
 σου· ἰδοὺ ἠγγικθῆ ἢ ἡ
 ἡμίρακῦ ἢ μεγάλη· καὶ
 οὐκ ἔστι οἱ περὶ θῆβ·
 ἀλλὰ ἴσμε τὸ κίφλο
 Δόβελου τοῦτο· ὃ δὲ δσο
 κέμοι ἢ κυρία τοῦ ῥῆγου·
 καὶ δῆσαι αὐτῷ, ὅτι
 χδρακτῆρα μασιχικ
 ἔχει καὶ παιδί σκηνου
 εἰμῆ· καὶ εἰπερὶ ἄμν·
Δπόσθι ἀπὸ μού· καὶ
 τῶ τῶ οὐ κί ποῖ νοσῶς
 κς βωπῆμοσσε μῆ· μῆ
 ποτε πῶ οὐ ροσεί δσο
 κέ οἱ αὐτῷ καὶ ἠθῶ
 με κοίρω ἠσαι τῆ αἰῶ
 τῆα; καὶ εἰπερὶ οὐδὴ θ·
 τί μεθ Ζορ· ἀρασο μεαῖα
 καθότι κς ὁ θεῖ εἰ ταπῆ
 μοσσε τῆρ μῆ βῆρ σου·
 τοῦ μῆ δού αἰσοικ δρ
 πῶ μῆ ἢ χ· καὶ ἔλυπῆ
 θη ἄμναι σφῶδρα· καὶ
 ἐκό τῶτο κοπι τῶρ μῆ
 γα· ὅτι οἱ μῆ δῆθ μ βῆ
 πῶσθ μ τῶ μ βυλῶ μ ἢ χ·
Καὶ ἐρί αὐτῆ γροκκῆ ἢ ἡ
 πῆ· τί ποιήσω· κλέοισ

προσά Ζοεαα πρῶ
 κῆ τῶρ θῆ μού· ὅπως
 εἰ ποσὶ τῆ αἰμῆ κς ὁ θεῖ
 μου· καὶ περὶ ἠλατο ἡ
 ἰεαῖτα τοῦ πῆρ βοσῶν
 τῆς· καὶ ἀπσείξατο
 τῆρ κί φδλῆ μῶ τῆς· ἔ
 πῶρ ἠλατο πῶσθ μ βῆ
 τῆρ μ πῶ κδρ δῆσ· καὶ
 ἐρί τῶτο τῶ πῆρ σω πῶ
 αὐτῆς· καὶ περὶ ὄρδμ
 ἐμμάτηρ· κατῆ μ κῆς
 τῶρ πῶρ ἄδ εἰσορ αὐτῶ
 τοῦ πῶρ ἠπατῆσαι· καὶ
 ἰδοὺ σα δα φμῆ δαῖ δμ
 ἐκάθισε μ ὑποκάτω αὐτῶ
 καὶ ἐλί τῶ μ ἄσε τῶρ δβ
 ασο τῆρ μ ἡ γοσῶ· ὁ θεῖ
 τῶρ πατέρω μ εῖ· ἡ μ
 ἠσορ με καὶ εἰσαῖ κοῶ
 τῆς δὲ ἠσορ ὡσ μού· καὶ
 ἀμῶ γκ ὄρ με· καθῶ σ
 ἀμῶ γκ ἠσαι τῆρ μ βῆρ
 σφῶρα· καὶ ἔδσο κασῶ
 τῆ ἡ ὄμ τῶ μ ἠσῶ αῖκ καὶ
 ἀπερῆσαι μ μῆ τῶ δα
 κρῶ μ ῆς τῶ μ ὡ μ ἠδτ
 κδ μ δμ φρῶ θῆσομ βῆ
 τῆ δα φμ· δαῖα· καὶ β
 θῆρ ἠμσε θῆρ ἠμ μ εἰ γδμ
 εἰ αὐτῆ μ ἡ γοσῶ· οἱ μ
 τί μ εἰ ἡ μ ἠμσε· πῶ α
 Δῆ μ βῶ αἰ τε κῆ μ εἰ, ὅτι



ὅτι ἔγωγε ἄνθρωπος κατὰ ἑαυτὸν
γενηθήναι οὐκ ὀφείλω
ἢ ἡμῶν καὶ ἰσχυρῶν ἄνθρωπων
ἔκμαστος κύριος τοῦ θεοῦ.

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι τῆς γῆς οὐ
ἔχουσιν ἄνθρωποις πετεινῶν
τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ὅτι καὶ ἂν
ἐπιπέσει ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
κτλ. οἱ ἄνθρωποι τῆς γῆς οὐ
ἔχουσιν ἄνθρωποις πετεινῶν
καὶ τοῖς θηρίοις
τῆς γῆς, ὅτι καὶ ἂν
ἐπιπέσει ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι τῆς γῆς οὐ
ἔχουσιν ἄνθρωποις τῆς γῆς
τῆς γῆς, ὅτι καὶ ἂν
περιπέσει ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα

ὅτι ἔγωγε ἄνθρωπος κατὰ ἑαυτὸν
γενηθήναι οὐκ ὀφείλω
ἢ ἡμῶν καὶ ἰσχυρῶν ἄνθρωπων
ἔκμαστος κύριος τοῦ θεοῦ.



αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ
ἐπιπέσει ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα

Καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα
καὶ ἂν ἴδωσιν ὅτι καὶ
ἂν ταῦτα ἔσονται ἐφ' ἑμὸν ὄνομα

ὅτι ἔγωγε ἄνθρωπος κατὰ ἑαυτὸν
γενηθήναι οὐκ ὀφείλω
ἢ ἡμῶν καὶ ἰσχυρῶν ἄνθρωπων
ἔκμαστος κύριος τοῦ θεοῦ.



λογισέε· ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἡ χίρα·
 δυκέτι μὲν χίρα· καὶ ἡ αἰ-
 τεκνος ἐργαστέλη τοῦ αἰ-
Καὶ αὖτε πάνσαι τοῖσ' αἰκῶν
 τῆ ἡλιεραὶ κ' ἐμὴ βρ τῷ
 οἴκοσ' αὐτοῦ· τῆ δ' ἐί παύ-
 ριορ· περσέ φερε τὰ δ' αἰ-
 ραῦ τοῦ· χίρα μὲν αὐτῶν·
 βδ' κ' ἰλάθη μοι· τὸ πῆ-
 τὰ λον τοῦ θωιακρίου
 φάμε εὐμοιοι ποίησ' ἔ-
 περσέ σ' ἐν ἰωακῶ μετῶ
 πτ' ἀλλο τοῦ θωιακρίου·
 ἔσ' τὸ τοῦ ἰερέως· ἔως δ' ἔ-
 β' αἰκῶν τὸ θωιακῆ
 ογκύ· καὶ οὐ κ' εἰδε μ' αἰ-
 τῆ δ' ἐμὲ αὐτῶ· καὶ εἰ-
 περ ἰοσ' αἰκῶν· μὲν οἰδ' αἰ-
 ὅτ' κ' ὁ θ' ὅ· ἰλάθη μοι·
 ἔσ' ἔμ' κ' ἐπ' ἄν τατὰ δ'
 μερτῆ μετὰ μου· καὶ
 αὐτέ μ' ἰοσ' αἰκῶν· ἔκ
 μαρ κ' ἔμ' αἰκῶν·
 καὶ ἡ θ' ἐμ' εἰς τὸν οἴκομ
 αὐτοῦ· ἔσ' πληρὸσ' θησ' ἔ-
 δ' οἰ μ' ἐμ' τῆ αἰ μ' ἡ·
 καὶ ἔμ' ἐμ' σε θ' ἡ· καὶ
 εἰ περ αἰ μ' αἰ· ἔμ' εἰ γα
 λῶ θη ἡ· τ' χ' ἡ μου τῆ ἡ
 μερτασ' τῆ· καὶ ἀ μ' β'
 κλημε τῆ μ' παῖδασ' τῶ
 τῆ μ'· πληρωθ' ἐμ' τοσ' δ' εἰ
 δ' ὁ μ' ἐμ' ῥω μ' ἰδοὺ σ' α

μελοθ' ὁ μ' τῆ παρδ' ἰ· ἐ καὶ
 λ' εἰσε τὸ ὄμορμα αὐτῆσ'
 μερτῆ αἰκῶν· γεμολερ' ησ
 δ' ἔμ' τῆσ' ὅσ' αἰ μ' ἡ αἰ·
 ἔμ' ἔμ' ἔμ' αὐτῆ μ' ἡ αἰ·
 τῆσ' αἰκῶν· τοῦ π' ἔμ' ἡ
 τῆσ' αἰ· καὶ ἔμ' αἰ β' ἡ μ' αἰ
 περ ἰ πατῆσ' αἰ· ἡ λ' αἰ
 εἰς τὸν κόλπο μ' αὐτῆσ'
 καὶ ἀ μ' ἡ πασ' ἡ μ' αὐτῆσ'
 χ' εἰσ' αἰ· ἔμ' κ' ὁ θ' ὅ μ' αἰ·
 οὐ μ' ἡ π' ἰ πατῆσ' αἰ·
 τῆ γ' ἡ τ' αὐτῆ· β' αἰ δ' ἡ αἰ
 μ' αἰ αἰ σ' αἰ τὸ μ' αἰ οὐκ ἔμ'·
Καὶ ἔμ' ποίησε μ' β' τὸ κοίτ' αἰ
 μ' αἰ τῆσ' αἰ αἰ σ' αἰ· καὶ
 κοίμ' ὁ μ' ἡ αἰ κ' ἄθ' αἰ τ' ομ' οὐ
 ἀ ἡ ἡ αἰ ο· ἀ αἰ τῆσ'· ἔ
 ἐ καὶ εἰσε τὰσ' θ' αἰ τ' ῥα
 τῶ μ' ἡ β' αἰ αἰ ομ' τὰσ' αἰ μ' ἡ
 ἀ μ' τ' οσ' καὶ δ' εἰ π' ἡ μ' αἰ
 αὐτῆ μ'· ἔμ' ἡ μ' ὁ δ' εἰ π' ῥω
 τ' οσ' εἰ μ' αὐτ' οσ' τῆ μ' αἰ
 καὶ ἔμ' ποίησε δ' ο μ' αἰ μ' ἡ γα
 λ' ἡ μ' ἡ οσ' αἰ κῶν· καὶ ἔμ' αἰ
 λ' εἰσε π' ἄ μ' τ' αἰσ' τοῦ ἰερέσ'
 καὶ ἀ ἡ ἡ αἰ ῥα· καὶ γ' αἰ μ' ἡ
 μερτασ'· καὶ τῶ γ' εἰ ρου
 σ' ἡ δ' αἰ· καὶ π' ἄ μ' τ' αἰ τὸν μ' αἰ
 ἡ ἡ λ'· καὶ περ σ' ἡ γ' ομ' αἰ μ' ἡ
 καὶ ἰοσ' αἰ κῶν· τοῖσ' εἰ τ' ῥα
 σ' ἡ καὶ ἡ μ' ἡ γ' ἡ σ' ἡ αἰ τῆ
 λ' εἰσ' αἰ τ' αἰ· ὁ θ' ὅ τ' ομ' π' ῥω μ'



ημεων, αμογησοντην
 παιδαυταντην καιδω
 αυτηομομααοοριονη
 βρυπασαιςταιςγεραισ.
Καιειωπμοραδς. γεροιο
 γεροιο. αμελω. καιπερ
 σιμεκων αυτηντοισδρ
 χειρασι. καιηυλογησον
 αυτηνλεγομενα. οθςτη
 υψωλεαυτων, βωιλι +
 επιτην παιδαυταντην
 καιαμογησοναυτηνισα
 τηναμογηδν. ηπιδια
 λοχλωουκίχει. καιαμην
 πατρηνειραυτηςεντ
 αλασματουκοιτωμοσ αυ
 της. καιειδουκεμαθου
 τη παιδι. καιιποισεν
 ωδηντωκοο. οτιεπεσκί
 ταυομε, καιαφελουτο
 ονειδοςμεουαποτωνβ
 χρωμεου. καιειδουκε
 μοικςοθςμεου, κερπ
 δικαοσωνς. τιςδραγ
 γειταιοισυοισρουειμε
 οτιαμραθηλαβει. ακυ
 σατε ακουσατε αιδου
 δειαφυλαητηςγης. οτι
 αμραθηλαβει. καια
 μεπαοσερ αυτηνβρυπο
 κοιτωρι τουαλασματος
 καιδενηλθε καιδηκομεν
 αυτοισ. τιμεγαλοσ ουω

υδηντου, κατεβησαν
 αφραμομεμοι. καιιδω
 ξαδαν τονβνιηλτηνδε
 παιδι προσετιθεμτοοι
 μεηρω αυτης. εγενετο
 δελιθηςηπαις. καιει
 περοπην αυτης. λμα
 ξωμερ αυτηνερτωμα
 κυ. οπωςαποδωμερ
 τηνιπατηλιαν, ημ
 πατηειλαμεθα. μεη
 πωςαπογαλη οδωποτ
 προςημεας, καιαπρος
 ακτορμενηται τοδωρο
 ημεων. καιειπερδμηδ.
Αμαμεροομεμβριτετορ
 βος. μεηπος. βητησ
 πρωημεραυ. καιειπ
 ιοσακμε. κελισατετ
 θυγατερασ τωνεβραη
 τασ αμαρτωισ. καιλα
 βετωσαμ αμαλαρεπα
 λα. καιεγωσδμ καιο
 μεμα. ιμαλεηγραφη
 ηπαιςεστων οπισσω. και
 αιχμεδλοοτηθηηκερδι
 αυτης. εκμαουκυ. και
 βωσινσδμου τοσ. εοσ
 δηνανειενβρυτωμαυκυ
 καιεδωδωτο αυτηνοι
 ιερθς. καιεφιλησδναυ
 τηνκαιειπομ. εμεγα
 λωεκς τοομομααοορι



πάσαις ταῖς γενταῖς· καὶ
 εἰ πρὸ μαδς· γέμοιτο· γέ
 μοιτο· ἀμεν· καὶ εἰ πομ
 οἰτερός· ἐπὶ σοὶ ὡς ἰσχυρῶν
 τῶν τῶν ἡμερῶν· φθνε
 ρώσε κς· τὸ λυτρωμ αὐ
 τοῦ τοῖς υἱοῖς ἰηλ· καὶ
 ἔκβαθισαν αὐτῆς· ἐπὶ
 τρίτου μαδς τοῦ θωσα
 φηρίδου· καὶ ἔμελλε κς
 ὁ θς χερδρὸν ἐπὶ αὐτῆ καὶ
 κατεχόρασε τοῖς ποσσὶν
 αὐτοῖς· καὶ ἠγάπησε μὲν αὐ
 τῆς· πᾶσ ὁἰκοῖς ἰηλ· καὶ
 κατέμελλε οἰγομρῶς αὐ
 τῆς· θυελοῦ τῶ καὶ
 ἀμοῦ τῶ· καὶ δὲ ξάβου
 τῶ τὸ μθρ· ὅτι οὐκ ἐπε
 γράφει ἡ παῖς εἰς ταῦ ὅ
 πίσο· ἠμδὲ μεδρία βρ
 οἰκοῦ· ὡς ἡ πρὶ φρ αὐ
 μεσομερῆ· καὶ ἐλάβε
 βδμετρο φηρὸς χειρός
 ἀγγέλου· γερομερῆς δὲ
 αὐτῆς δωδεκαετοῖς·
 συμεβού· μορὸς ἐμ βροτ
 ἰερέων λεγόμετων· ἰδου
 ἠμεδρία γέγεμε δωδε
 καί τῆς· ἔρρωμ κς· τί
 αὐτῆς ποιήσομεν· με
 πως μελάν τὸ λησασή
 ελομκῦ τοῦ θ· ἠμερ· ὅ
 τι ἠγίστηρό καρὸς αὐ

τῆς καθὼς πάσαις ἀγῶ
 μαῖς· καὶ εἰ πομοῖτε^{εἰς}
 τῶ ἰσχυρῶν ἐπὶ τὸ θωσα
 φηρομκῦ· εἰσελθὲς τὸ
 ἀγίασμα κς τοῦ θ· ἠμερ·
 καὶ πρόσβασι πρὶ αὐτῶ
Καὶ ὁ ἐμφανέρωσεν οἰκοῖς
 τοῦ τοποιήσομεν· καὶ
 εἰσηθίμοῖτε ῥάσ· εἰς τῶ
 λησασή· ἠμερ· λαβῶν
 τὸ δωδεκακώδωμον·
 καὶ ἠνέξατο περὶ αὐτῆς·
 καὶ ἰδου ἀγγελος κς ἐφῆλε
 γωμ· **Β**αχάρια· ὅβελθε
 καὶ ἐκκλῆσιασμο· τῶ
 χηράομασ τοῦ λαοῦ·
 καὶ ἐμεγαλτωσάν τε κς
 φος ῥάμεδρ τῆς αὐτοῦ· ἰς
 φηρὸν δὲ πεδρῶ κς ὁ θς
 σκμεζομ· τοῦ του γεμ· ἰς
 ὅζῆ λθε **Β**αχάριασ· καὶ
 ἀπέφῆλε κήρυκασ κς φθ
 λησ τῆς περιχόρου φ
 ἰουδαίας· καὶ ἠνυλισεν
 ἠσάλπιξ κς· καὶ ἀθε
 ἰδραμερῶν πᾶν τῶ· ἰσ
 σῆφδὲ ρί· τασ καὶ αὐτόσ
 τὸ σκέ πῶρρομ· ἀπῆλθον
 εἰς σιωδμηστῆ αὐτοῦ·
Καὶ σιωδμηστῆσ· ἀπῆλθον
 πρὸς τὸν ἰερέα λαβόλ
 τῶ τῶσ ῥάμεδω αὐτῶν·
 ἰς λαβῶν οἰτερόσ τῶσ ῥά



υδωσ· εἰ σὴ θηρ εἰς τὸ
 ἰεσομ· καὶ προσήυξατο·
Τε μεσσητος δὲ αὐ τοῦ τῆρ
 ἄλχηρ· ἔλαβε τὰσ ράβδ
 καὶ ὄζηθε καὶ ἐπέδωκε
 αὐτοῖς· τῆρ δὲ ἐσχάτην
 ῥα υδωρ· ἔμαβερῖω σήφ
Καὶ ἰλου ἀπὸ τῆς ράβδ
 ὄζηθε πριγεραὺ καὶ ἐ
 πετάθη ἐπὶ τῆρ κβ
 φδληρῖ οὐσῆφ· καὶ εἰ
 περ οἱεράσ τῶ ἰωσῆφ
 σὺ κε κλήρωσαι λαβῆμ
 τῆρ πρὸ θέρμορ κῦ· πρ
 ράλαβε αὐτῆρ εἰς τῆ
 ρησιμῖ αὐτῶ· καὶ ἀντῆ
 περῖ οὐσῆφ λέγωμ· ἦ οἶσ
 ἔχωμε οὐτέροισ· καὶ ἦ
 πρὸ βύτης εἰρεῖ· αὐ
 τηδὲ με ἀμῖς· μεν πω
 ἔσομαι πριγελοστοῖς ἦ
 οἰς ἰηλ· καὶ εἰ περ ἄ
 ριασ οἱεράσ τῶ ἰωσῆφ·
 φοεήθη τι κῦ τὸρ θῆσ
 καὶ μενήθη τι ὄσαι πόιν
 σε κς· τῶ κορε· καὶ τοῖ
 λαθῶν καὶ τῶ ἀβερῶμ
 πῶσε· ἀχάθη ἦ γῆ καὶ
 κατεπόθησαν πάντ
 ἀατῆρ αὐτῶ ἰηλ
 αὐτοῖσ· καὶ μὴ ἰοσῆφ
 φοβήθη τι· μεν πω
 γαταῦ ταῖμ τοῖ οἰκοσ

Καὶ φοιηθῆσ πρὸ ἔλαβ
 αὐτῆρ· εἰς τῆρ ησιμῖ αὐ
 τῶ· καὶ εἰ περ αὐτῆ· με
 ρία· πρὸ ἔμαβ ὀμοσε κῦ
 κῦ· καὶ μὴ κατὰ λῆσ
 σῦ τῶ οἰκοσμου· καὶ ἀ
 πέρχομαι οἱ κοδοδεῖα
 τὰσ οἰκοδομασ· καὶ ἦ
 πᾶλιν πρὸσ σῖ· κς σ
 διαφυλάξοι· ἔτερο
Δε συλλεβού ἠορ τῶ ἰε
 ορ λεγομ τοορ· ποῖ ἰσω
 μεν κατὰ πῖ τὰσ μεατοῖ
 μαῶ κῦ· καὶ εἰ περ οἱ
 ράσ· κδ ἔσο μερ ὀκτῶ
 πρὸ θέρμορ· ἐκ τῆς φυ
 δαδ· καὶ ἀπῆθρο οἱ ὕ
 πηρέται καὶ ὄζητησαν
 καὶ ἀρορῖ πῖα πρὸ θέρμ
 καὶ μενήθη οἱεράσ
 πω· δὸς μερῖασ· ὅτι
 ἦρ τῆς φυλῆς δαδ· καὶ
 ἀεὶ ἀντοσ τῶ θῶ· καὶ
 ἀπῆθρο οἱ ὕπηρέται
 καὶ ἀρορῖ τῶ ἦ γορ αὐ
 τῆρ· καὶ εἰ σῆ γορ αὐτ
 σῦ τῶ μαῶ κῦ· καὶ εἰ π
 οἱεράσ· λέγε τί μοι ὠδ
Τίς κῖ θει τὸ χρυσοῦν ἰ
 τὸ ἀεὶ ἀντορ· καὶ τῆρ
 υάστορ· καὶ τῆρ σῆρ
 καὶ τὸ ὕακῖμ θιμορ· ἰ
 τὸ κόκκιορ· καὶ τῆρ



ἄνηθιμὴν πορφύραν·
Καὶ ἔλαχε μεδρία· ἡ ἀλωθ
 ρὴ πορφύρα καὶ τὸ κόκ
 κισμὸν· καὶ λαβοῦσαι· αὐ
 πείησ τὸ μοῖκον αὐτῆς·
Τὴν καὶ ῥῶθ κέρμη· **Ζ**εφύρι
 ἰοίησθε· καὶ ἔγεμε τὸ ἀν
 τάν τοῦ σαμεοῦ ἢ λ· με
 ρία· λαβοῦσαι τὸ κόκκι
 μόν· ἐκλοσθε· καὶ λαβοῦ
 σατὴν κἀλ· πηρ· ὅζῃ ἦθε
 γεμίσαι ὑδωρ· καὶ ἠλθ
 φωνὴ χεῖρας αὐτῆς· χαίρ
 κη χαρίτω μετὶ ὅκ· μετ
 σου· ὡς ἰοίησθε μετὶ ἡ
 ρωαί· ξίμ· ἢ δὲ προσβλε
 ψασθε μετὶ ὄψι· αὐτῆς καὶ ἀελ
 φερῶ· πόθεν ἡ φωνὴ αὐτῆς
 καὶ σὺ ἔροσθε μετὶ ὄψι·
 εἰσὶν ἄλωθ· εἰσὶ τὸ μοῖκον
 αὐτῆς· καὶ ἀμέ· παυσετ
 κἀλ· πηρ· καὶ λαβοῦσα
 τὴν πορφύραν· ἐκαθίσ
 τῶν τοῦ θεοῦ αὐτῆς· ὡ
 εἶλκε τὴν πορφύραν·
Καὶ ἔλαχε μεδρία· ἡ ἀλωθ
 ρὴ πορφύρα καὶ τὸ κόκ
 κισμὸν· καὶ λαβοῦσαι· αὐ
 πείησ τὸ μοῖκον αὐτῆς·
Τὴν καὶ ῥῶθ κέρμη· **Ζ**εφύρι
 ἰοίησθε· καὶ ἔγεμε τὸ ἀν
 τάν τοῦ σαμεοῦ ἢ λ· με
 ρία· λαβοῦσαι τὸ κόκκι
 μόν· ἐκλοσθε· καὶ λαβοῦ
 σατὴν κἀλ· πηρ· ὅζῃ ἦθε
 γεμίσαι ὑδωρ· καὶ ἠλθ
 φωνὴ χεῖρας αὐτῆς· χαίρ
 κη χαρίτω μετὶ ὅκ· μετ
 σου· ὡς ἰοίησθε μετὶ ἡ
 ρωαί· ξίμ· ἢ δὲ προσβλε
 ψασθε μετὶ ὄψι· αὐτῆς καὶ ἀελ
 φερῶ· πόθεν ἡ φωνὴ αὐτῆς
 καὶ σὺ ἔροσθε μετὶ ὄψι·
 εἰσὶν ἄλωθ· εἰσὶ τὸ μοῖκον
 αὐτῆς· καὶ ἀμέ· παυσετ
 κἀλ· πηρ· καὶ λαβοῦσα
 τὴν πορφύραν· ἐκαθίσ
 τῶν τοῦ θεοῦ αὐτῆς· ὡ
 εἶλκε τὴν πορφύραν·

ἀπὸ κυθῦ ^{ως} ζώοντος· καὶ
 πᾶσαι γυνήτικται· καὶ ἰ
 δου ἔτη ὀλίγη· κῦ· λῶν
 αὐτῆ· οὐχ οὐτως μεδρία
Δὲ πρῶτον αὐτοῦ· ἔπειτα
 σεταί· ἐπὶ σὶ· καὶ δέωα με
 ὑψίτου· ἐπισκίαση·
 διὸ καὶ τὸ γερῶ μεμόν
 αὐτοῦ κληθήσεται· ὡς ἔκ
 πρὸς γίου τε χθίμ· ἡ ὄσ
 ἡσίου· καὶ ἔσθε δὲ
 τὸ ὄμοσεν αὐτῶν· αὐ
 τὸς γὰρ σώσθη τὸν λαόν
 αὐτοῦ· ἀπὸ τῶν ἀμεδρῶ
 ὄντων αὐτῶν· καὶ εἰ περ
 ριῶν· ἰ· δου ἢ ἀχ· ληκῶν
 γένοιτο· μετὰ τὸ ῥῆμα
 σου· καὶ ἀπῆρθερ ἀπᾶν
 τῆς ὀλίγη· καὶ ἐπλή
 ρωσε μεδρία τὴν πορφύ
 ραν· καὶ τὸ κόκκισμὸν·
 ἢ γὰρ τοῦ ἰερεῖ· καὶ ἡ
 γνησθῶν τὴν ὀλίγη· ἀσ
 ῶ μεδρία· ἐμετὰ χεῖ
 κῶ τὸ ὄμοσεν σου· καὶ ἔ
 ὡς ἰοίησθε μετὶ ἡ
 ρωαί· ξίμ· ἢ δὲ προσβλε
 ψασθε μετὶ ὄψι· αὐτῆς καὶ ἀελ
 φερῶ· πόθεν ἡ φωνὴ αὐτῆς
 καὶ σὺ ἔροσθε μετὶ ὄψι·
 εἰσὶν ἄλωθ· εἰσὶ τὸ μοῖκον
 αὐτῆς· καὶ ἀμέ· παυσετ
 κἀλ· πηρ· καὶ λαβοῦσα
 τὴν πορφύραν· ἐκαθίσ
 τῶν τοῦ θεοῦ αὐτῆς· ὡ
 εἶλκε τὴν πορφύραν·



πρὸς τὴν θύραν· καὶ ἦνοι
 ξιμῶν τῆν· καὶ ἠυλόγησ
 αὐτὴν καὶ εἶπε· πόθεν
 μοι τοῦτο· ἴρα ἔλεθ' ἠέ κερ
 τοῦ κύμου πρὸς με· ἰδοὺ
 γὰρ τὸ ἰεμεοὶ ἐσκίρτησε
 καὶ ἄλογησε τὸν κῆν· καὶ
 μεδρία· ἔπελάθησ' τῶν
 μετηριουμ, ὡμὲ λάλησ
 αὐτῆ γαιρὶ ἠλό δ' ἄρχησ
 ρησ· καὶ ἀπερὶ σασωμα
 ρία εἰς τὸν οἶκον· εἶπε·
Κεκε· τίς ἐμεὶ γὰρ, ὅτι ἰδοὺ
 αἴγυρι αἰτῆς γῆς μεδχα
 ελοῦσ' με· καὶ ἐποίησε
 πρὸς τὴν ἐλισάβετ, μεν
 μαστρεῖς· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἠ
 μέρα καὶ ἡμέρα, ἠγα
 γῆρα αὐτῆς ὀγκοῦτο· καὶ
 ἐκρυμν βαυτῆν ἀπὸ τ
 ῆσ' ὡμὶ ἠλ καὶ φοιη θῆσ
 ἀπῶι εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτ
 ἠν δὲ ἔθωμ δ' ἔκαθ' ὅτι
 ἔθεντο τὰ μετηρία
 ταῦτα· ἔθεντο δὲ αὐ
 τῆ· ἔκτος μεν· καὶ ἰδοὺ
Ιῶσηφ, ἠλθερ ἀπὸ τῶροι
 κοδομων· καὶ εἰσῆλθ
 εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ· ἔ
 ἰδων τὴν μεδρία μὲν ὀγε
 μένην, ἀθίως ἔτυψ
 εἰς τὸ πρὸς σπορον αὐτ
 καὶ ἔρριπτερ ἑαυτὸν χα

μεαὶ αὐτὸν τὸν σακκομ· καὶ
 ἔκλαυσε πικρῶς λέγουμ.
Ποῖο πρὸς σὸ ποῦ ἀπερῶ
 πρὸς κῆν τὸν θῆμου· τι
 δι' ἄξομαι περὶ τῆσκο
 ρησ ταύτης· ὅτι πῶρ
 θέμου αὐτῆν πῶρ λαβ
 ἔκμασ' κῆν τοῦ θῆμου· ἔ
 οὐκ ἐφύλατσα αὐτῆν.
Τίς τὸ πρὸς σπορον τοῦτο
 τοῦ οἴκου μου ἔργασατο·
 ἔλεῖ ἀπερ αὐτῆν· μεν
 τι ἀρεκε φθλασ' ὀνηκ
 ἔορῖα τοῦ ἀδάμε; ὡσ
 ἠν γὰρ ἐμτηδ' ὀμορῖα
 αὐτοῦ· ἠλθερ ὀφῖς· ἔ
 ἄρε μὲν ἠν τῆν ἄσθ
 καὶ ἠπάτησερ αὐτῆν· ἔ
 τος καὶ ἐπῆ μεοισω β
 με· καὶ ἀνιτην ἰωσῆφ
 ἀπὸ τοῦ σακκου· καὶ ἔ
 κάμσερ αὐτῆ ἔεἰπερ.
 ἠμὲ μὲν ἠν τῶ θῶ· τι
 τοῦ τοῖ· ποῖησασ· τίς
 τὰ πῆρ ὀσασ τῆν τῆ
 σου· ἔω φάθου κῆν τοῦ
 θῆσου, ἠ ἀμῶρα εἰσ
 εἰς τὰ ἀπαστῶν λῆιων·
 καὶ πρὶ κῆν λαβ' οὔσατο
 φῆρ; ταῦτα αἰχοῦσα
 μεδρία, ἔκλαυσε πικρῶς
 λέγουσα· καθότι καθ' ἕ
 εἰ μετ' ἠμὲ καὶ ἀνδραοῦ



Ηρόσκοο· και αποκριθ^{εις}
 οιοσηφ· ειπρω αυτη·
Ποθε μοι εν τούτοις γα
 φρίσου· η δε ειπρω· Ζη
 κς οθς μου· καθοτι ου η
 μοσκοο ποθεμ του τοις φρι
 βριεσσι· και ακουσασι ω
 σηφει φοιμη θηφοδρα·
 και ηρεσησε μοι αυτης
 και εμουχασατο· τι αυτη
 ποιησει· και ειπρω ο
 σηφει με αυτοι· εν αυτης
 κριτου το αυεδρτημα
 αρεθισομαι τω μοσο
 κυμαροειμος· και εν
 φανεροοσο αυτη τοις υ
 οισι ηλ· φοβουμαι μελι
 ππος αγγελικόμενι το εν
 αυτη· και αρεθισομαι
 παραδιδω αιμα ενω
 ομεις κριμα θανάτου·
Και κατεβαβεν η ρυξ· ο
 ιδδου αγγελος κυφαιμ εν
 αυτους μεγυρ· μεν φοβη
 θης τημ παιδαυαυτημ·
 ροθρεμ αυτη· εκπριεθη
 ληίου· τεξειται δι νιορ και
 κολεσης το ομομα αυτ
 ιμ· αυτος ενρσοση τον
 λαον αυτου· απο τωρ αι
 μεδρ το ομ αυτου· και
 ενιενι ωσηφ απο του
 υπμου· και εδξαση τ

θη η ηλ· τον δ ομτα αυτη
 χαριμ και δξαση· και ε
 φυλασσε τημ παιδα·
Ηλθε δε και ανμασ ο γρα
 ματασ· και ειπρω αυτου·
 διατι ου κε φάμης εν τη
 σωφωγη περς τημ συνο
 δομη μεωσήμερον· ο
 ειπρω οσηφ· οτι εκλε
 εκ της οδου· και ανμα
 σωμην τημ μεδου ημερ
 και γραφης ανμασ ο γρα
 ματασ· ιδε τημ με
 ριδροσκοειμην· και ε
 πιηδρωμαος περς τ
 ιερεα· και ειπρω αυτου·
ακουσομμου· ιωσηφ ω συ
 μεδρ τυρης ημην· η ο
 μεσησε φοδρα· και ειπ
 οιερασ· τι του τοις ποιη
 σεμ· ο δε ειπρω· τημ παρ
 θεμορ ηρ παρταμ εν
 μαου κυ· ενι ανμα αυτη
 και εκλετε το ω γαλλω
 αυτης· και ου κε φανερω
 σε τοις υοισι ηλ· και ει
 πεμοιερασ· ενω ιωσηφ
 ταυται ποιησε· και ει
 πρω ανμασ ο γραμμα
 τασ· ιμαιδης οτου
 ταυδεμα· απο φαλον
 υπηρετασ· και αρησ
 τημ παρ θεμορ ογκοειμ



Καὶ ἄντι ἀπὲς γὰρ ὑπὲρ
 ρέτασ· καὶ ἄλλοι καθὼς
 εἶπε μὲν ἄσ οὐ γρᾶμ
 μετὰσ· καὶ ἀνήγησαν
 τῆν ἐς τὸ ἴερον· αἶμα
 δὲ καὶ τὸ μίωσῆφ· καὶ ἔ
 φη ἐς τὸ κριτήριον· ὅ
 εἶπε μὲν αὐτῆ ὀϊεράσ·
Μαρία· τί τοῦτο εἶπὸν
 καὶ ἔταπύρουσασ τῆν τυ
 χήνου· ἔπελάθου κῦ
 τοῦ θυσοῦ, ἢ ἀναβαρῆ
 σαίς ταῦ ἀνατῶν γήϊων,
 καὶ λαβούσα Ἐροφῆν βη
 χεῖρσ ἀπὲς ἔλου; ἢ ἀκού
 σασα τῶν ὑμνων αὐτῶν,
 καὶ χόρῳσασ ἐμοῦ ποιο
 ἄντων; τί τοῦτο εἶπὸν
 ἢ δὲ ἔκλαυσε πικρῶς λέ
 γουσα· **Ζ**ῆ κ' ὁ θεῶ μου
 καθ' ὅσον ἔμελλ' εἶναι ἐμὸν πῆ
 ἄντον· καὶ ὄνδρα οὐκ ἠ
 νόσκοο· καὶ εἶπε μὲν ὀϊε
 ράσ τῶ ἰωσῆφ· τί τοῦτο
 εἶπὸν σασ· εἶπε δὲ ἰω
 σῆφ· **Ζ**ῆ κ' ὁ θεῶ μου, ὅτι
 καθ' ὅσον ἔμελλ' εἶναι τῆσ·
Καὶ εἶπε μὲν ὀϊεράσ τῶ ἰω
 σῆφ· μετὰ τὸ μὲν τῶ
 ρεῖ· λέπε μὲν τὰ ληθῆ·
 βκλιτῶσ τῶ γάμοσ
 αὐτῆσ· καὶ οὐκ ἐφάνερω
 σασ τοῖσ υἱοῖσ ἠλ· καὶ οὐ

κ' ἐκ λησασ τῆν κρεφάλα
 σου ὑπὸ τῆν κραταλάνυ
 χεῖραι, ὅπως ὄμοιθ ἠ
 τὸ σπέρμασ· καὶ ἰωσῆφ
 ἰσῆγησ· καὶ εἶπε μὲν ὀϊε
 ράσ· ἀπόδοσ τῆν πῶρθε
 μορ ἠμ· πῶρθε λαμβέκρασ
 κῦ· καὶ περὶ δακρυσ γρό
 μεμοσ ὀϊεράσ, εἶπε τῶ
 ἰωσῆφ· ποτιῶ ὑμᾶσ τὸ
 ὑδωρ τῆσ ἐλῆξεοσ κῦ·
Καὶ φάνε ρῶσα κ' τὸ αἶμα
 τῆν μελῶσ· καὶ λαβούσα
 ὀϊεράσ, ἔποίησ τὸ μίω
 σῆφ· καὶ ἔπεμπε τῶν
 εἰσ τῆν ὄρημ· καὶ ἠλ
 θεμ ὀϊε κληροσ· καὶ ἔθῶ
 μεσοσ πασ ὀϊεράσ, ὅτι
 μετὰ τῶσ κ' ἐφάνε ἠμ
 τοῖσ· καὶ εἶπε μὲν ὀϊεράσ
 εἶ κ' ὁ θεῶ· οὐκ ἐφάνε ροσ
 τὸ αἶμα τῆν μελῶσ
 οὐδὲ ἔμελλ' ἐκρίμοσ ὑμᾶσ·
 καὶ ἀπὲς λιπε μὲν αὐτοῖσ· καὶ
 πῶρθε λαμβέκρασ τῆν
 μετὰ τῶσ· καὶ ἀπὲς ἠε
 ὀϊε κ' αὐτοῦ χαίρουσ· καὶ
 δὲ ξάβουμ τὸν θῆ ἠλ·
Καὶ φάνε δὲ ἔμελλ' εἶναι
 αὐτοῦσ καὶ ὀϊεράσ· ἔ
 πείρῳ φεθα ὄσ· ἔσῳ
 ἔμελλ' εἶναι τῆσ ἰουδαῖσ·
 καὶ εἶπε μὲν ἰωσῆφ· ἔσῳ

ἔμελλ' εἶναι τῆσ ἰουδαῖσ·
 καὶ εἶπε μὲν ἰωσῆφ· ἔσῳ

απογράφουμαι τοῦ ἡ
 οῦ μου. ταύτην δὲ τῆν
 παιδαυτί ποιήσω. πῶς
 ἀπογράφουμαι. γυναικ
 ἰμένη; ἀλλ' ἄσχόμεμα.
Δ ἄσθυ γατέρα; οἱ δὲ
 οἴοι ἰηλ ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι
 θυγάτηρ. αὐτὴ δὲ ἡμέ
 ρα κῦ ποιήσῃς βούλε
 ται. καὶ ἔρωσε τῆν ὄμ
 ἰωσὴφ. καὶ ἔπε κάθισεν
 αὐτῆν. καὶ εἶπε βρῶν ὅς
 αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ κολῶν θείσαι
 μεῦν ἡλ. καὶ ἡ λθορὶ πῶ
 μίλιον βίτον. καὶ ἔγρα
 φη ἰωσὴφ. καὶ ἰδὲ τῆν
 μεδρίδην γυνῆν. καὶ εἶ
 πε βρῶν αὐτῶν γυν. ἴσως
 τὸ ἐμῶν τῆ χειρὸς βεβαί
 αὐ
 τῆν. καὶ παλιν ἔγραψεν
 ἰωσὴφ. καὶ ἰδὲ τῆν
 γελῶσαν. καὶ ἔγει αὐτῆ
Μ αρία. τί ἔστι τοῦτο. ὅτι
 τὸ πρῶτον πόρσου βλί
 πω. ποτὶ μετ' ἡμερῶν
 ποτὶ αἰ γελῶν. καὶ
 εἶπεν αὐτῶ μεδρία. ὅ
 τι δὲ ἰωσὴφ ἔλεγε πρῶτον
 τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς μου. ἔ
 μοι χαίρονται καὶ ἀλλῶ
 οῦνται. καὶ ἔμακλαιον τ
 ἰσκοπτομέτρον. καὶ ἡ λθο
 σαν ἀμῶν ἐσσητῆς ὀδῶ

καὶ ἔπε τῶ ἰωσὴφ ἡ μεδρία.
Κ ατὰ γὰρ με. ὅτι τὸ ἐμῶν
 εἶπε γέμε. περὶ λθῶν.
 καὶ αὐτὸς κατήγγευσεν
 τῆν ἰωσὴφ. καὶ εἶπε
 αὐτῆ. ποῦ σε ἀπαύξω. ἵ
 σκε πῶσω τῆν ἀσχόμε
 σάν ην. ὅτι ὅτι ποσὶ ἔρη
 μέος ἐστὶ. καὶ ἀρβυρὸς κεί
 σπύλαον καὶ ἡ γατρῶν τῶ
 καὶ πρὸς ἐστὶν αὐτῆ τῶ
 ἰωσὴφ αὐτοῦ. καὶ ὅτι ἡ
 Ζητήσαι με ἀνέμερα
 ἀνέμερ ἰωσὴφ πρὸς πα
Ε τῶν καὶ οὐκ ἴσχωρ. καὶ
 ἀνέβλεψεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν.
 ἵδῶν τὸν πόρον τοῦ οὐ
 ρανθοῦ ἔσῳται. καὶ ἔπι
 μεψεν εἰς τὸν αἴρα.
 καὶ εἶδον τὸν αἴρα ἐκ θάλα
 σσον. καὶ τὰ πτενῶν τοῦ
 οὐανοῦ ἠρέμεν. καὶ ἔπι
 μεψεν αὐτῶ πτῆρ ἡν. καὶ
 εἶδον σταφῆν καὶ κείνην.
 καὶ ἔργατος ἀνακείμε
 ρου. καὶ αἰ χεῖρ ἔσῳται
 ἐπὶ τῆσκάφην. καὶ οἱ με
 σῶμενοι οὐκ ἐμασῶντο.
Κ αὶ οἱ ἀερματῶ. οὐκ ἀνή
 φρον. καὶ οἱ περὶ φέρον
 τῶ ἐμῶν ὁ μεσῶν αὐτῶν.
 οὐκ ἀνέφρον. ἀλλ' ἀπὸ



Του ημ τα προ σω π λ
 μωβ λει πορτα. και ει δ ο μ
 προματτα ε μω μ ο με ρ
 και τα προ βατα ε τ η κ
 ω η ρι δε ο ποι με η μ του
 πατα ζα αυ τα. και η
 χει ρ αν του λ μ ο ο. και ε
 πι με τα ε πι τον χει
 με ρ ρ ω του πο τα με ο
Και ει δομ το ω ε ρι φο ο.
 και η μ τα ε ο με α τα αυ τ
 ε μω μ ο με ρ α και πι ρ ο ρ η.
 και πο ρ τα υ πο θ η ξ η μ τ ω
 δ ρ ε μ ω αυ τ ω ρ λ π η λ α
 μ ο ρ τ ο. και ει δ ο ρ γ ω α η
 κα τα με α μ ο υ σ ο μ α πο τ
 ο ρ ρ η η σ. και ε χα ρ η τ ι σ α
 με ρ α λ λ η λ ω. και α πο
 κ ρ ι θ ο σ α η π ρ ε ο ι λ μ β
 που πο ρ α λ η. η μ δε ει ο ρ
 αυ τ η. με α ω ε β ρ α ι δ η
 η τ ο ο. και α πο κ ρ ι θ ε ι σ α
Ο ει πε ρ αυ τ ο ο. ε ζ η λ η σ ο υ;
 δε ει πε ρ αυ τ η. μ α ι. α
 π κ ρ ι θ η αυ τ ω μ ε γ ο ω α.
 τ ι σ ε τ η ρ η μ τ ο ο σ η λ α ι ο ο.
 ο δε ει πε ρ αυ τ η. η με
 με ρ η τ ω με ρ η μ ο ι. ει π
 λ ι α ω τ ω. ο υ κ ε τ ι σ ο ι γ υ
 ρ η. ει π ε λ ι ο σ η φ. αυ
 τ η τ ι με α ρ ι α. η α ν α ρ α
 φ η σ α β η τ ω ρ α ω κ υ. και
 β κ λ η ρ ο ο σ α με κ ρ α υ τ η λ

γω α η κ. και ου κ ε τ ι με ο
 γω η. α λ λ α ο υ λ λ η με α η ε ι
 εκ π ρ ο σ η ο υ. και ει πε ρ
 αυ τ ο ο η με α ι α. Του τ ο α λ λ η
 θ ο β ε τ ι; και ει πε ρ αυ τ η.
Ε ρ ρ ο υ και ι δ ε. και α π η η
 με α ι α με τ α υ του και ει
 σ η ρ η ρ σ η τ ω σ η λ α ι ο ο.
 και η η με φ ε λ η φ ο τ η ρ η.
 ε π ι σ κ ι α β ο ω α τ ο σ η λ α ι
 ο ρ. και ει πε ρ η με α ι α. ε
 με γ α λ ω θ η η τ η η με ο υ σ η
 με ρ ο μ. ο τ ι ει δ ο μ ο ι ο
 φ θ α λ με ο ι με ο υ πο ρ α δ ο
 ξ α σ κ η ε η. ο τ ο σ η τ η ρ ι
 τ ω η η λ ε γ ε με τ ο. και πο ρ
 χ ρ η με α η με φ ε λ η υ π ο
 τ ε λ λ η τ ο ι κ τ ο ο σ η λ α ι ο ο.
 και ε φ α η η φ ο ο σ με γ α η μ
 τ ω σ η λ α ι ο ο. ο ο σ π ε τ ο ω
 ο φ θ α λ με ο ω αυ τ ω ρ με η
 φ ε ρ η μ. και κα τ ο λ η γ ο ρ τ ο
 φ ω σ ε κ η ρ ο υ υ π η λ η ο ε
 ο ο ι φ α η η τ ο υ ρ ε φ ο σ και
 ε λ α μ με λ η ο ρ η κ τ η σ η λ η
 τ ε ο σ αυ τ ο ο με δ ρ ι α ο.
Και η υ ε β ο η σ η ρ η με α ι δ η
 γ ο ω α. ω με γ α λ η μ ο ι η
 η με ρ α ο κ η με ρ ο μ. ο τ ι η
 δ ο ρ τ ο και μ ο ρ β ε α με α η
 η ρ. και ε ζ η λ η θ ε ρ η κ τ ο ο
 σ η λ α ι ο ο η με α ι α. και α
 π η ρ η τ η σ η ρ αυ τ η η ο δ λ η



μεν· και ειπε αυτη η
 μαϊα· σδλωμεν· σδλωμε
Και ο μεν χουσοι θεια μαυδζη
 γισαθαι· παρ θειος εγε
 μνησεν· ου χορηγη φιοις
 αυτης· και ειπε σδλωμε
 Ζηκς οθς· εδν μεν βαλ
 τον δακτυλον μου και ε
 ραμησω την φυση αυτη
 ου μεν πιδρω· οτι παρ
 θεος εγεμνησε· και ειση
 ρθην μαϊα· και ειπε τ
 μαρια· σκηλαπσομ ε
 αυτην· οτι ου μεν κερσ
 αμη με πικραται πι σοι· ε
 η ρθι μαλει τον δακτυ
 λον αυτης η σδλωμενης
 την φυση της παρ θεου·
Και αυθις η χειρ αυτης
 πυρια πεκοπε το απαν
 της· και ανεκραζει σα
 λωμεν ε ειπερ· ου αιτη
 δυο μιν αμεου και τη αυτη
 τια μου· οτι οζει παρ
 σαθη ζωηται· και ιδου
 η χειρ μου αποκοπε τη
 απτε μου· και εκημησε
 γομαται αυτης σδλωμε
 προς τον δακτυλον της
 σα· οθς των πρωμεου·
 μενηθη τις μου· οτι αστρ
 μα αυρα αυτη εμε και ι
 σα ακ· και ι ακωα· και

μεν παρ αδφ γελατισκεε
 τοις υοις ιηλ· αλλα απο
 λος με τοις πιμνησι· οις
 οιδασ δωσω τα· οτι πι
 διοροματισου· φερα
 πησιν πετελου· και τον
 μεθόμενου παρ αυτου ε
 λωμεν· και ιδου
 εγγερος κυ επετη αυτη η
 γνη· σδλωμεν· σδλωμεν·
Επηκουσε μο δωσω της
 δε ησε οσα· προς αφο
 την χειρα ε· τω παιδι
 ου· και βαψασον αυτο·
 ε ετασοι χρω και σρια·
Υδισα μιν· περσηλθε
 τω παιδιω και η ταυτο αυ
 του· και ιαθη και ειπερ·
 αρωγη τοσ οθς· ιδου εδω
 μασι λασ εγενηθη τω
 ιηλουτος· και εζηλθε
 σδλωμενηκ του σπηλαιου
 δε δικαωμεν· και ηλ
 θε αυτη φωνη λεγουσα·
 σδλωμεν· σδλωμεν· ελη
 απεγειλησ αυ ειδε πα
 ραδοξασ κειρον· εος
 ανεστη η παις ενι ληλη·
Και ιδου η τοιμαθη του ε
 ξεληθμεν στηνι ουδα αυ
 και θορυμος εγενησεν
 κεν θλετε της ουδα αυ
 ηλ θορηθμεν οια απο λη



Τολών λέγοντες. πού ε
στιν ο τεχθής βασιλεύς τ
ιουδαίωμ. ιδου μεν γάρ
αυτου τον πατέρα εν τη
αματολη. και ηλθομεν
περσικω ησαι αυτου.

Και ακουσαο βασιλεύς η
ρώδης. εν τω αρχη. και
επειμειν υπηριτας
περσικω βασιλεω. και με
τεπειμειν αυτου. με
τεπειμειν αυτου. δε και τω
ιερως εν τω πρατωριω λε
γων. πως εγραπται εν
ταυτη περι τουτου. πού γε
νεται. λεγουσιν αυτου εν
βηθλεεμ της ιουδαίας. ηλ
θομεν γαρ μενοι απο αυτου
μωρ. ζητωσιν ταυτη περι τουτου.

Και απεσταλην αυτου. και
αμειν κριμε τον βασιλεω λε
γων. τι οιδασπισμενοι
επι τον γεμνηθεν βασι
σιμω. και εν πομοιεω. ο
ιδου μεν γαρ αυτου λεγειν
ταυτα μεν εν εν τοις
αγεροις τουτοις. και δε
βλωδω ταυτωσιν λεγειν
παντας. ωστε εν φημε
θαυ. και ουτω εν γεωμε
ημες. οτι βασιλεύς εν γε
μνηθεν τω ηλ. και ηλθο
μεν περσικω ησαι αυτου.

Και εν περ αυτοις ο βασιλεύς
ηρώδης. υπηριτε και ζητη
σαυτα κριμωσ. και εν παν
αρητε, απηγε εν αυτω. ο
πως κεν εν τω περσ
κω ησαι αυτου. και εν ηλ
θομοι μενοι. και εν δουδ
την ομ εν δουδ εν τη αματο
την. περ η γεμω τουσ. ε
σοσ εν τω εν τω βασιλεύ
εν η εν τη κεν φαλω τ
παιδίου. και εν δουδ
οι μενοι τον παιδα μενοι
μενοι εν της μερ αυτου.
εν εν μενοι απο τω εν
σαυτω αυτου εν δουδ
χρωσ. και εν μενοι. και
εν δουδ. και περσικω
μησιν ταυτωσιν. περ
οκμενοι. και ου τουσ κρη
μασ περ εν ταυτη υπηριτε
μεν εν τω εν τω εν τω
δουδ. δε αυτου ο δου
αμειν κριμωσ. εν τω εν
χουδω αυτουσ. το τε εν
ο ηρώδης. οτι εν πα
χθη εν τω εν τω εν τω
γιαθης. εν τω εν τω
ταυτα ταυτα λεγων
αυτοις. εν τω εν τω εν τω
μεν εν τω εν τω εν τω
κατωτερου. και ακουσα
σαυτω εν τω. οτι ταυτα εν τω

Ζητεί ο βασιλεύς φομάσι.
 Φομεν θήσω, έλεβε τον
 παιδαυ. και εσδργάμω
 στραυ τον. και αμέ κλιμ
 αυ τον εν τή φάτην βο
 ωμ. η δε ελι σαύβειτ
ακούσασα οτι ωάμνησ
 Ζητείται, λαβούσα αυ
 τον, αμέ κεις τήν οργ
 μην. και περιε με πθ
 που αυ τον κατα κρύτφ.
 και ου κήν το ποσάπο κρυ
 φος. τότε γεμάσασα
 ελι σαύβειτ λέγφ. ο εος θυ.
 δόξα μερα με τα τε κμ.
 ου γάρ ηδύωατο λαβη η
 η ελι σαύβειτ απο τον φόβ.
 και πορ αρημεαι εδιχαί
 φκ το ο εος. και εδόξα
 το αυ τήν αματω τε κμ.
Και ην το ο εος εκήμο, δια
 φαίνομ αυ τοις φώς. αττε
 ης γάρ κυ ημε ταυ τω.
ολαφυ λάσων αυ τοις
 δε ηρώδης εζητείτ
 ηωάμνημ. και απίε φλ
 υπηρέτας εν τω θωσαση
 ρίωι. πεδος ζαδρίδμ λέ
 γομ, που απέ κρυτασ
 τον ηωάμνημ. ο δε απε
 κείματο λεγω αυ τοις.
 ηω λει τουργος υπέρχ
 θυ. και περ σεδράω τω

μόρεω και τω μαω κυ. ε
 ου γμ οόσκοο που ετιμ ού
 όσμου. και απηθμο ού
 πηρείται και απηγει λω
 τω ηρώδη λ'παντα.
Και οργθς ο ηρώδης ει
 πεμ. ο πούος αυ του με
 λχειασοι λάσμεν τω.
 ηηλ. και επε με τα πα
 λιμ υπηρέτας εκδωτί
 ρου λεγομαυ το. ει πτε
 το λην θφ, που ετιμ ο
 υόσα. ο δε ει πεμου
 κί τίτωμα. και απη
 γει λω οι υπηρείται το
 υασοι λει. και τον τρι τον
 πτε με τασ. ει πεμαυ τω.
ει πτε μοι που ετιμ ο υόσα
 ου κοίλασ οτι το αιμα
 σου εν τή χειρι μου ετι.
 και απηθμο οι υπηρείται,
 και απηγει λω τω ζαδ
 ρίω. και ει πτε μεδρ τω
 ει με του θυ. εκ χείμου
 το αιμα. το δε πμ α, ο
 δωσά της δόξαι. οτι
 αθωομα με εκ χείσ
 εις τα προ θυρα του μα
 κυ. και περι το δάφω
 μα, ε φομάθη ζαδρί.
 και ου κοίλασμο ο υόσι ηλ
 το πώςε φομάθη. αμ
 τή ωρα του ασασμου.



υδρουμου

απηρομοι ιερχς και ου
 κληρητιση αυτοις η α
 ρισια Ζαχαριου και ετη
 σθη ο ιερεϊς προσδοκωμ
 τω τον ζαχαριαν του αυ
 σπασαθαι αυ τον εμαχ
 και δεξασαι τον θη τον
 υγιον. χερσι στυος
 δι του ζαχαριου ε φοβη
 θησθη παντω και το λ
 μενσασ εις οζ αυτωμ αυ
 πηρημενς το αγιασμα
Και εδε περ αυτο θωσθη
 ριορκυ αιμασ πεπηγοσ
 και φωμη η λεγοσθη Ζα
 χαριασ πεφομαται και
 δυκοβλαει φθησεται το
 αιμα αυτου εως ανελθη
 ο εκδικος αυτου και αυ
 κουσασ τον λογον τουτον
 ε φομηθη ο ζηθη και
 απηγειλε τοις ιερασι
 αυ ει δε και ηκουσε και ο
 σθηρομ και εδωμ το γεγο
 μησ και τα φληωμ
 του μαου ο λαου ζαχα
Και αυτοι περιεσχισθησθη
 απο αυμου θειωσ και τω
 και το σωμα αυτου ου
 χαρον το δε αιμα αυτου
 αερον λιθορ γεγημεν
 και ανηγειλαν τω μαω
 οτι ζαχαριασ πεφομαται

Και ηκουσθη αι φυλαι του
 λαου και επεμθησθη αυ
 τον βησ ημερασ και ης
 μυκτασ και εεταται
 ταιμου λαου του οιθ
 ρησ τιμα αματησ σωτη
 εις τον τοπον Ζαχαριου
 και ποιησθη τω κληρο
 ανιεν ο κληροσ επισυ
 μεωμ ουτοσ ηρκε
 χρημασ ειμεσ υπο
 του πνευματι δεινθαι
 τουμ περι δειν τον χυ
 κυ εγω δε ιακουωσ
 εγραψατην ρισιαν
 τωτην οτε δε ετεμα
 τησ ηρωδησ σιωπη
 λησεν αυτον εν τοπω
 ερημοι εωσ κατεπαση
 ορυελοσ ενι χημε δεξα
 σο δε τον δωσθη τον χυ
 τον δωμταμοι υπομο
 μηνι γραψατην ρισια
 αν ταυτην οτι αυτοι
 περι πασ αυδεσ αυ
 ματω περι και τω λησ
 πηνι μω και λει και ος
 τουσ αυμασ του μαωμω
 αρενησ κη
 τον εν ατοις περ ημεπερ
 αφεπισκοπων στατηνον
 εγκομιον εις την περα
 ακον εν περ :-

